

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

THE TREASURES OF MACKENZIE ISLES



"AT LAST WE HAVE OUR HANDS ON THE
TREASURES OF MACKENZIE ISLES!"
MUTTERED THE DEMON PIRATE.

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

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The Treasures of Mackenzie Isles

or
The Outlaws' Drag-Net

By COL. SPENCER DAIR

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

ARLIE THANET—A brave young fur-trader, hunter, and prospector for gold, in the wilds of British North America. He falls under the displeasure of Gilbert Burgos, better known as Gil Burgos, leader of an outlaw band, who have been terrorizing the great North-West. Arlie, whose fighting blood is always roaring through his veins, meets the bandit on his own ground, the Fort McPherson gambling saloon, unmasks the outlaw as a card-sharper, and then follows him down the swiftly flowing Mackenzie River, where he braves the dangers that are hidden behind the dead hand which bars the way to his search for the treasures that lay hidden in Mackenzie Isles.

HELEN VERNON—The beautiful daughter of Professor Vernon, a member of the High-Brow College, known as the Universal College. Sweet and twenty, Helen shows Arlie Thanet a thing or two in horse riding. She coquettes with a fierce wild-cat, shoots the animal when it charges at her in mad rage, and then figures in the fight for life, which Arlie and his boon-companion, Obadiah Good, has to wage to save the lives of the entire party. Helen is worth studying. She is an American girl, who "makes good" on Canadian soil.

OBADIAH GOOD—Better known as "Obie Good" (which he says he always tries to follow, "oh, be good") the merry, fat, hearty, good chap, who is always ready to help his best friend, Arlie Thanet, in times of danger and trouble. If one had a world full of chaps like Obie, the world would be the better for it.

PROFESSOR "FOGGY" VERNON—A grave and learned Instructor and Professor in the wonderful Universal College, sup-

ported by millionaires and who is in British North America for the summer studying bugs and animals for his work on this subject to be published some time in the following winter. He got his name "Foggy" from students under him, who considered that he was always in a "fog" on everything except his favorite bugs and animals.

GILBERT BURGOS, alias GIL, THE OUTLAW—A meaner man never lived in the thug bands of the North-West. His criminal career was a long one. A gun-man, he was outwitted by Arlie Thanet. A gambler he was outgambled by the younger man, and finally meets his fate at the hands of a pirate from the Caribbean Seas, who loots the gold that he has looted from others.

JOZSEF MARTINO—A fierce Hungarian-Italian outlaw. He betrays his leader for a few thousand dollars, and then betrays again the secret of the years of the casting of *The Outlaws Drag-Net* to a band of pirates, who sail into Mackenzie River from the Pacific Ocean to loot the looters.

POMPEY DUCKLEGS—A Genne'men ob Color, sah, but a right good chap at that. He plays the hero just once when he is needed the most. This stamps him as being worthy of a place here in this column.

MUSKAK—A Salteaux Indian. He kept a popular gambling house at Fort McPherson. In his house began the downfall of Gil Burgos, the outlaw.

HELLFIRE HARRY—A man of substance at Fort McPherson, British America, in spite of his name.

BIG NOSE FINNERTY—He knew how to referee a card game in Muskak's saloon which was straight poker with a \$25,000 limit, a game worth going hundreds of miles to see played.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEAD-HAND SIGN POST.

"It is the hand of a dead man!"

Arlie Thanet, fur-trapper and gold-hunter stammered these words in amazement.

His companion, Obadiah Good, with a white face blinked in reply.

The two young men in the silence of the unchanging British North America gazed blankly at each other.

Before their eyes, nailed to a tree, was a yellowish-white human hand.

It was a hand that had once been part of the frame of a huge man.

For the hand was large with long, taper fingers that suggested strength.

The hand had been rudely severed at the wrist.

The crushed, twisted tendons and muscles hung flabbily.

Underneath the hand on the ground there was a pool of something crimson and sticky.

"Blood!" stuttered Obadiah Good as he pointed with shaking index finger.

The appalling hand had struck from the eyes of Thanet and Good the wonderful views of the mountains far and white-cloud capped; the long ripples of Mackenzie River, joyous under the sunlight, with infinite shadows and bursts of open reaches, that marked the spot where the majestic river is split up by many islands, as it sweeps into Mackenzie Bay on its way to the cheerless cold of the Arctic Ocean.

The two athletic young men only saw the dead hand.

It was a mysterious hand yet it seemed to fit into the wild land that has been wild since the beginning.

"Is not that hand pointing to something?" said Good after one more fascinated stare.

"Impossible," replied Thanet.

The hand, however, sprawled on the tree as it was, seemed after all to try to transmit a message; a message of signs.

"The dead hand is a sign-post!" cried Thanet. "Look! The index finger is outstretched in the act of pointing!"

"It is," replied Good. "It is pointing back to Fort McPherson which we left a week ago."

"It is warning us to go no further among the islands that dot Mackenzie River here," added Thanet.

The hand did not move but into each watcher's mind the lights, the music, the dance-house, the faro-game, the saloon of Fort McPherson seemed to flash out distinctly calling them back to the ungoverned hours of frontier barbaric pleasures.

The hand was turned away from the wide spaces of the fur-hunter, and trapper; the gold-seeker, and the burden-bearer, who tried to wrest fortune from its flinty grasp.

"Yes. It's a warning to turn back," went on Good. "But——"

"It would take more than a dead hand to make me turn back," continued Thanet, as he took the words from Good's mouth.

"But nevertheless that hand is a warning to go no further," rejoined Good.

"If we go further?"

"The dead hand has given its message to us. The rest we must stumble to read from the primer of life by ourselves."

"Hum."

Thanet sat down and with eyes that seemed to be trying to search the future, turned over the mystery in his mind.

Good watched him for a time in silence. Then he spoke.

"Do you see a light, Arlie?"

"Not as yet."

"Dead men don't nail their hands to a tree out here hundreds of miles from anywhere?"

"True."

"Therefore, some one has nailed that hand there who was living?"

"Precisely."

"The man who parted with that hand, and that bit of wrist that shows on the tree-bark so plainly, was of a build not to part with his hand in life."

"You mean the owner of the hand must have fought for his life?"

"Either that, or he was murdered by a secret method."

"And was dead before the hand was severed."

"That's the idea."

Thanet jumped up and walked down to the shore of the island where the large canoe of the two men lay half in and half out of the water.

A second canoe still rode on the river a few feet away, filled with the traps and baggage of the two young men out on a fur-trapping and gold-hunting trip in the North-West wilds.

Thanet pulled the second boat ashore by its confining rope and moored it alongside of the other canoe.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Good.

"Better have both canoes where we can get at them quick," answered Thanet. "I'm not sure that there's only that dead hand about us."

Good fingered his revolver which lay in its holster, attached to a leather belt about his waist.

He leaned forward and pulled his rifle out of the leading canoe.

"Better have our weapons where we can get at them quicker than we can at the canoes," answered Good with a cheery smile. "You don't know what confidence a good gun puts in a fellow."

"Doesn't it?" replied Thanet. "Well, here's my weapons ready. Now then to investigate."

Thanet began searching the shores of the river as he spoke.

Good guarded the two canoes meanwhile.

Thanet moved about like some great panther, his muscles flowing, smooth and easy beneath his skin.

His brown eyes were intent with his mission.

Obadiah Good, his companion, was short—chunky, blonde, blue-eyed, and cheerful.

His friends always called him "Obie Good," and he always said he liked it because "Oh-be-good" was what he *always* tried to be.

"I find tracks here," called Thanet to Good.

"Men or animals?"

"Men."

"Let's see."

Good rushed to where Thanet was stooping. Thanet pointed to the plain impression of feet.

"Two men, wearing boots," said Thanet.

The deep marks made by the heels of two pairs of boots, probably the high-hipped kind used by a certain type of North-West man, showed plainly.

Good's keen woodcraft spelled out something.

He communicated it to his companion.

"Men going the same way?" he said softly.

"Yes. There were two men."

Good pointed back toward the river.

"They came in one canoe," he asserted.

The plain marks in the sandy rocky shore showed that Good's words were based upon a self-evident fact.

Good ran down toward the canoe marks.

"Look here, Arlie!" he cried.

Thanet ran to Good and together they leaned over the sharp betraying tracks.

"Ah!" said Good with a long drawn sigh. "Here's another pair of boot-heel marks."

Good clutched Thanet by the arm.

Infinite meaning was there in the flash of crossing glances each man gave the other.

Thanet pointed down at the betraying tracks.

"One pair of boots made those marks," he cried.

Good pointed over to where the first tracks had been discovered.

"Two pair of boot-marks there?" he whispered.

"One pair only here."

The wind that blew from the mountain suddenly seemed to be piercing cold. The sunlight darkened beneath a cloud.

"Over there," ventured Thanet, "the two boot-marks were going toward the interior of the island."

"True."

"Here where we stand only one pair of boot-tracks can be seen."

"Yes?"

"These point toward the river——"

"Two men visited this island in a canoe. Only one returned," hissed Thanet.

"There's a mystery here that smells of murder," returned Good in his low soft tones. "The man who owned that dead hand is here yet."

"The man who murdered him left only this trace behind in this tiny imprint upon the shores of the island."

"Come," solemnly answered Thanet. "Get your weapons ready. We must get to the bottom of this mystery. Where is the man who once owned that dead hand?"

"Come on," replied Good as he crouched down to escape any assassin's shot that might come from the underbrush near them.

His eyes were glued to the betraying tracks that

sharper and sharper led back toward the interior of the island.

CHAPTER II.

THE TRAIL OF THE ASSASSIN.

With weapons ready, and eyes that flashed in their eager quest, Thanet and Good followed the track.

The island was deeply wooded. After its fringe of rocky, sandy soil that faced the river front, there came a tangle of thicket, then this in turn merged to the smaller timber, all to be over-topped by the silent forest that made the very center of the island an impenetrable jungle.

The two men followed the out-coming tracks that slanted as if making one section of a gigantic "Y," until they merged at the arm of the "Y" into a mass of indistinguishable marks.

Here Thanet halted.

"Look back," he said to Good.

Good's eyes followed Thanet's pointing arm.

"To the right, you see, just from whence we came are only tracks that lead away from this point," Thanet remarked.

"I see it plainly."

"This tells us pretty plainly that the one man who left this island went down that way to the right—alone."

"No question of that."

"It also tells us when you look to the left, that the tracks that lead to this point where we are standing, come from the river-front."

"No question of it."

"They also show us that two people made those tracks."

"They do."

"Two came from the canoe to this point. One person left this point for the river, coming back."

"No question but that you read the story as plain as if it was a printed page."

Thanet stooped and picked up a card.

"Look," he said.

It bore the address of a merchant at Fort McPherson.

"Ho! Ho!" eloquently remarked Good.

"Exactly," returned Thanet.

Both men felt from the card that the tracks had been made by two men who knew of Fort McPherson and its pleasures.

"The men who have been here, from that card, are from Fort McPherson?" queried Good.

"That's my belief."

"Oh."

Good spoke in a dry tone.

"Why do you speak in that tone?"

"Do you know, or did you ever hear of Gilbert Burgos?"

A pink flush swept over Thanet's face.

"You mean, Gil Burgos, the outlaw of Mackenzie Isles?"

There was meaning dread and sombre in the returning nod that greeted the speaker's eyes.

"I do," came the answer.

"I've heard of him. Murderer, outlaw, assassin of all decency, gun-man, thug. That's about all I know of Gil Burgos."

"That's enough."

"Well, what of Gil?"

"These tracks, that dead hand look like the handiwork of this outlaw."

"Or of some one in his band."

"His band of fifty picked bravos never would have had the brains to get to the bottom of this plot—for somehow I feel sure that the dead hand there was plotted out by Gil Burgos for some inner reason of his own."

"You think—is he after us?"

"Oh, I don't think that—possibly. But he intended to give *us* or any one *else*, that visited this island to spy upon his deeds, that Fort McPherson and the settlements was the place for us, or for any one to hurry to when they saw the indicating finger of the dead hand."

"That is to say you don't know whether the hand means that Gil Burgos is after us or not?"

"That is what I do mean."

"You also mean that if not a warning to us not to intrude on this island, it's a warning to any one who may dare to step foot on it?"

"You're right. That's just what I mean."

"Let me point out to you that an inhabited island might need protection that such a warning gives."

"Go ahead—you've got more to say than that."

"But this island is uninhabited."

"I suppose there's wild animals here?"

"I mean by man."

"It's supposed to be uninhabited, but there's those that say—well never mind."

"Those that say, what?"

"There's those that say that there's an island in this Mackenzie River group, that is the home of the pirate gang led by Gil Burgos."

"Oh. Then people at Fort McPherson think that there's an island out here among the dozens that dot this part of the river, where Gil Burgos, the outlaw, makes his home."

"Exactly. They do say back in the settlements that the outlaws have always a *drag-net*—somewhere out among these islands—and they call it the place where lie buried or concealed *The Treasures of Mackenzie Isles*; the loot of the outlaw gang led by Gil Burgos."

"Ah. It might be worth while to get down to the secret of the treasure buried by Gil Burgos. It must be worth the finding."

Good looked at Thanet with immense surprise dawning upon his face.

"Get the Gil Burgos treasure?" Good laughed. "Ho! Ho! Hee! Hee!"

"What is there funny in that?"

"Before you can get the treasure you've got to get—Gil Burgos."

"Well?"

"There's nothing so very funny in that. I think most every gun-man in Mackenzie territory, British North America, has had a whirl with 'Gil Burgos in the hopes of getting Gil's cash and plunder.'"

"How did it come out?"

"Gil's here yet."

"Oh?"

"So's the men who went gunning for him."

"Where?"

"Oh, bury me deep, where the wild winds sweep," sang Good, from the "Cowboy's Lament."

Thanet laughed heartily.

"All of which means that if I go out to get Gil Burgos, I'd better be ready for my grave."

"Surest thing you've said in a day of talking."

"But really why should I go after Gil?"

"I dunno."

"Will he construe this visit to the island as something he should interfere in?"

"I think Gil will interfere pretty sudden."

"Ah."

With this not very enlightening remark, Thanet shouldered his rifle and hurried toward the interior of the island.

Good shook his head and followed him.

"Bound to invade Gil Burgos' island, eh?"

"Humph! This island belongs to King George of England, if it belongs to any one. I am a subject of the King. I don't think I'll stop for any outlaw that strides across this country, frightening little children and old women."

"You mean me?"

"Many a full-grown man is only an old woman, and many an old woman has never grown up."

"With these few remarks I will follow you," added Good after a few moments of said remarks.

What the remarks were it is not necessary to print but they were very expressive.

Thanet laughed when Good had continued.

"Obie, you had better 'be Good,'" Thanet remarked. "Never mind, boy. We will go this far—we will jump into the center of this mystery and see what there is to it. If Gil crosses our path—well, we must remember that self protection is an absolute thing to look after in this country."

"If you don't you don't live long out here."

"You're on, you see."

"I guess I am. Any way, I'm going to get to the

bottom of this matter, Gil Burgos, to the contrary notwithstanding. Come on!"

The two young men walked now with more careful steps toward the interior of the island.

There was caution in spite of their words in every move.

Each felt that it was a serious matter to thus boldly walk into the secrets of Gil Burgos, outlaw, and terror of this part of the North-West.

Thanet led to the high ground that ran along just where the heavier timber met the scraggly second growth.

"Why come up here?" questioned Good. "The tracks trail along the bottom there."

"Best to walk on high ground till you know what's on the low ground," replied Thanet.

"Oh."

The two men hurried now a trifle, but in silence.

They felt that they were nearing something that might have a tremendous effect on their future.

"See those crows, circling there, ahead?" questioned Thanet after a bit of rough climbing over steep, rocky ground.

"I see."

"Look here."

Good looked with all his eyes.

He saw down in the bottom-land long, swift, strides that gave one the impression, in spite of himself, that they were strides that had been made by a running man.

"Well—well!" speculated the men together, after a long silent inspection of the scene. "There's where the man who returned to his canoe *alone* came running with hurrying strides."

"Why did he run?" asked Good.

"Come here," returned Thanet.

He soon covered with eager steps the distance between the spot.

"All right," answered Good.

The two stood beside a clump of bushes.

The crows that were circling in the air about the spot now hurried off winging their way into the silent woods with cries of harsh protest.

Thanet stepped forward.

His hands grasped the bushes.

He pulled away the dank shrubs from a heavy something that lay concealed by them.

"Ah!" Thanet said.

Good looked over his shoulder.

There, face up to the un pitying sky, lay a dead man.

Across his breast was loosely placed an arm, with the hand gone, leaving a bloody, mutilated stump where the right hand had been.

"This is the owner of the warning hand!" cried Thanet, as he looked down upon the face of a young man with a heavy black beard, whose wide open black and sightless eyes seemed to ask for his charity.

Thanet stooped over the body.

"Murdered!" cried Good.

"Here is the solution of this mystery," replied Thanet.

In his hand he held a sealed packet, which he had just taken from the pockets of the dead man.

CHAPTER III.

"NAILED!"

"You think you can play poker, eh?"

The speaker, a tall, broad-shouldered man was sneering. His black hair and beard were bristling with anger.

There was a cruel gleam in his deep-set eyes.

Bad-man was written in every line of his figure.

The speaker was Gil Burgos, the bandit.

Facing him, with a slow smile on his face, stood Arlie Thanet.

Behind Thanet was to be seen the rotund form of Obie Good.

"I never think," answered Thanet, as his lips tightened.

People in the saloon walked quietly away from the three men.

High words in The Red Light saloon in the hamlet surrounding Fort McPherson sometimes meant "a shootin'-scrape," and when men got to shooting each other up it sometimes was better to be away from the scene.

No one could tell how one might be dragged into a fight. Fighting was so common in the Red Light.

"You never, think eh? What do you mean by that?" howled the outlaw, as his hand went down toward his revolver.

Quick as the eye could follow the motion Thanet grasped the outlaw's downward stealing arm.

"Not yet!" cried the young trapper. "Not yet, Gil! Leave that weepin' alone. You and I will play that game of poker, right now. I told you I didn't think I could play poker, I knew it."

The outlaw searched his opponent's face with his eyes.

There was something in the quiet down-drawing of Thanet's lips; there was a tiny bright light in his eyes, that peeped out like a wild-cat looking from his cage that made Gil pause, outlaw as he was.

The bandit's shifty eyes traveled over toward the curious crowd that was watching the by-play.

He saw sympathy for Thanet, detestation of himself, and he translated the expressions quickly.

"This gang only need a leader to make it unpleasant for me."

Gil thought discretion the better part of valor, just then.

He assumed a hearty air.

"Now Arlie Thanet," the outlaw's fierce, deep voice

said, "don't take no offence when none is meant. I am challenging you to a game of draw-poker."

Thanet smiled. The smile was like a moonbeam falling upon a bit of steel. It betrayed. It covered up.

"Well?" asked Thanet.

"Will you play?"

"Surely."

"I don't play a child's game here."

"For how much?"

"Name the stakes yourself."

"One thousand dollars a chip. No more, no less."

The outlaw staggered back.

But he recovered himself at once.

"That's playing them up as high as the house, isn't it?"

"You told me you did not play a child's game."

The desperado's face flushed.

His voice trembled with anger as he replied.

"Well, I accept the challenge. It's for one thousand dollars a chip."

Thanet drew a great round pile of bills from his inside pocket. They were in highly picturesque bills the promises to pay in bullion, the sum denominated in each corner, and issued by the Canadian government.

Thanet "skinned" off a handful of bills.

"Hey, you Muskak!" a Salteoux Indian, who kept the saloon. "Translate this stuff into American gold. We play only for American gold, you know. You challenged me. I make the terms," Thanet went on.

Muskak soon handed Thanet several rolls of "yellow boys."

There was ten rolls of twenty-dollar gold pieces thus idly resting in Thanet's hands.

Each roll contained ten pieces.

Thanet jingled the two thousand dollars in his hand and sneered at Gil, the outlaw, as he spoke.

"Here's enough to start on," Thanet cried.

"What's the limit?" asked the bandit.

Thanet walked over to a vacant table covered with green-baize, the typical poker-table with a slot cut in the center for the "kitty."

Thanet sat down.

He pulled his great roll of bills out of his pocket.

These he rapidly counted.

He shook the pile at the outlaw.

"Fifty thousand dollars."

The words rang through the room.

Open-mouthed the on-lookers began to draw near.

Gil Burgos, the outlaw, went white with rage. He was being bearded in his own stamping grounds, the saloon, by this mere unknown fur-hunter.

But he controlled himself with an effort.

"That's pretty high stakes," he cried.

Thanet gave a shrug of his shoulder.

"This is my proposition," he cried. "We will each change all our bank-bills into gold. Gold will be the

basis only for our game. When we have the bank-bills changed into gold, we will each buy with it our chips. These are to be of one thousand dollar valuation each. The limit of our stake is fifty thousand dollars. Here's my stake, for its to be a 'table-stake' game, right here."

This meant that there was to be no credit. The cash must be paid in advance for every chip; they would be redeemed on presentation in gold at their face value, less the usual commission for use of the room in the saloon in which to play, to go to the Indian keeper of the resort, Muskak.

Gil Burgos was white with hatred—it was a great stake to play for—and he did not know exactly what to do.

"I don't know as I can raise such a stake in a moment," cried the outlaw. "Let me talk it over with Muskak."

The bandit withdrew with the Indian, and carried on a long conversation in a corner of the room.

"Say, Arlie, where in the world did you get that stake?" whispered Obie Good whose eyes were as big as walnuts, and whose open mouth could have taken in a great fly population.

"Never you mind," cried Thanet. "I've got it. That's all there is to cash now days. Just have it."

The outlaw seemed to have come to an understanding with Muskak.

He returned to Thanet.

"I will play you for a table-stake of twenty-five thousand dollars," Gil said a little shamefacedly. "I've strapped myself to-day but Muskak says he will stake me for that sum."

Thanet curled his lips.

Thanet shrugged his shoulders.

"I hate to play a child's game," he said, "but I'll take down half my money and play you for twenty-five thousand dollars."

The crowd applauded wildly.

"Say, Thanet handed one right thar ter Gil," yelled Big-Nose Teddy Finnerty who was watching the by-play. "He called that thug's bluff now, didn't he?"

"Shore, boy, shore," replied Hellfire Harry West. He bore his name because of the frequent use of the words that finally were accepted as his real name. "That feller Thanet handed back them words 'child's game' neatly, by——" and the speaker did not belie his name.

"S-s-h!" came a storm of hissing protest from others in the crowd.

The room became silent again.

Every man there watched the splendid duel between the two men.

"Well, are ye ready?" said the outlaw as he turned toward the table and picked up a pack of cards.

Thug shuffled the paste-boards a few moments.

"Cut for deal," he cried to Thanet.

Thanet threw back his head with a merry laugh.

"We will buy our checks first."

Thanet turned to the listening crowd.

"Big Nose Finnerty, and Hellfire Harry, will you come up here and bank for us?" queried Thanet.

"What's the matter with Muskak? Isn't he good enough for a banker?" growled the outlaw.

"Yes, under ordinary circumstances. Not when the Indian has loaned you a stake to play in with me."

The crowd applauded. The general opinion was, it was easy to see, that Gil Burgos, the bandit leader had met his match at last.

By this time Finnerty and Harry West were standing by the side of the two money-duelists, ready to act as bankers.

All the pearl poker-checks were handed to them.

"Give me twenty-five thousand dollar's worth," carelessly cried Thanet.

A gasp ran round the room.

"Same here," growled the outlaw.

When the bankers had the shining gold, they sat down near at hand to watch the game. They were two highly respected fur-trappers in the hamlet, and their acting as bankers for the game indicated that it was looked upon as a high social event or they would not have contaminated themselves by appearing in the matter in the slightest degree.

"Now cut!" cried the outlaw, extending the pack of cards he had again shuffled.

Thanet took the cards and tossed them across the room.

They fell in a heap of face-cards, suite cards, all be-draggled and dirty.

This was a deadly insult in that region.

It was a challenge to one's opponent and meant that one feared that the cards had been marked.

There was just a faint movement made toward his gun by Gil.

He was thinking of turning the game into an exhibition of gun-play.

"No! No! No!" the crowd roared as one man.

Gil Burgos, robber chief, took the hint.

The roar hinted too much of the tightened rope wielded by a lynching party.

"A new deck of cards, here, Muskak," cried Thanet.

When the cards were produced Thanet spun them unopened, over to Hellfire Harry and Big Nose Finnerty.

"Pass on them, please," briefly snapped Thanet.

A murmur of applause swept through the crowd.

They saw that while Thanet wished no advantage to be taken from him, he did not propose that any advantage should be taken of him.

"A square sport," yelled a voice among the crowd.

"Thanet is that," another voice replied.

Then silence again settled on the scene.

"These cards are all right," the committee of two at length reported.

Each man was an adept in "milking" a deck. This consists in taking aces, Kings and Queens, and shaving off a very little at each end so that a delicate touch of a gambler's hand in dealing the cards will tell just what card is passing to an opponent, among the marked higher cards.

By varying the "stripping" a very famous gambler knew whether he was dealing an opponent kings, queens or jacks, and knew about the value of each hand out against him, as a Wall street man knows just how much stock stands out in a certain stock company amalgamation.

The little device of pricking with a needle dots on "face-cards" which one's hands could brush when dealing and again, thus, getting a shrewd idea of what "t'other man was holding," and numberless other tricks of cards had been quietly investigated by the committee.

Every man in the room knew the deck "wan't crooked" when the committee turned it over to the players.

The game began.

"Two hundred dollars to play," cried Thanet, forcing the game, as soon as he had an opportunity of raising the "edge."

"Two hundred better," sulked the outlaw.

"I make it five hundred. Half a thousand dollars to draw cards."

A shudder ran through the room.

"Hully Snakes! what a game—a thousand to draw cards!" shrilled a voice.

"There'll be some betting arter one comes in, eh?"

"Hu-s-sh!" came the command.

It was Thanet's deal.

He threw five cards to each, himself and the outlaw, dealing of course, one card at a time to each player.

Both men "came in"; thus having five hundred dollars in the pot that lay before them.

"Cards?" asked Thanet of Gil.

"One card," came the reply.

Thanet dealt himself one card.

But he did not look at it. It lay face down by his right hand.

Gil looked at his card. He was a good poker-player. His face betrayed nothing. His muscles were under perfect control.

Then the betting began.

"One thousand," cried Thanet, who led off.

"One thousand better," roared Gil.

"One more."

"One more."

"Still another."

"Another."

"Two more."

"And one."

"Still another."

Gil's face was white now.

He "skinned" his cards carefully.

What he saw seemed to give him renewed betting courage.

"A thousand dollars more," he cried.

"One thou' more," came the expressionless voice of Thanet.

He had not moved from the position he had taken when the game began.

The card he had dealt himself still remained face downward. He had made no movement to look at it.

The two men now snapped their bets like the bark of fierce wolves.

The game ran up, higher, and higher, until at last Gil Burgos stood up his face white.

"Twenty-five thousand," he screamed. "That's the limit."

He spoke true.

Fifty-thousand dollars in checks lay before both men.

"What have you got?" asked Thanet in his same, unimpassioned voice.

"Three aces. It's my pot," howled the delighted bandit.

Gil Burgos' hand closed over the great pile of checks.

They represented, he thought, fifty thousand dollars.

"Joy! Joy! oh what joy was soon to be his."

But as he grasped the checks in his great hairy paw, down upon it swept a keen Bowie knife.

It buried itself in his hand.

Its blade tore through the outlaw's hand, and buried itself in the table.

"You infernal cheating outlaw, I've nailed you this time!" cried Thanet. "Boys, look here!"

As he spoke Thanet turned over the four cards he held in his hand. Their faces shone upward.

Three aces and a pair of kings lay in plain view.

"Turn over Gil's cards," cried Thanet to the committee.

The committee did as they were directed.

There was upturned three aces and a pair of queens.

"Were there six aces in that pack when you examined it?" cried Thanet of the committee of two.

"Sure not," replied Hellfire Harry. His companion nodded.

Hellfire Harry turned over the bandit's cards.

"Boys," he howled, "look here! Two of Gil's aces ain't from the same deck as these hyear others. Gil Burgos has wrung in outside cards."

There was a fierce roar.

But Gil Burgos, the bandit, had wrenched himself loose from the Bowie knife. He had jumped from the window at his back and disappeared.

"I'll cash in now," smiled Thanet to the two bankers. "Hi there, Muskak, champagne for the house.

Give me bills, Mr. Bankers. I hate to be loaded down with so much outlaw gold."

CHAPTER IV.

A FIGHT TO THE GRAVE.

"Well, you've put yourself in it all right, if you are twenty-five thousand dollars poorer," cried Obie Good, the next morning to Arlie Thanet.

"Why poorer?" asked Thanet.

"You'll blow the cash in by night if you keep on the way you're going. You've been buying champagne for the town ever since you won. Now, boy, even fifty thousand dollars isn't inexhaustible."

Thanet smiled.

"I'm blowing in all I got out of that dirty thug," he replied, "but I'm not blowing in my twenty five thou' that I wagered, because only half of it belongs to me. That half, namely twelve-thousand five hundred dollars I send to my good old mother, out in the United States of America, and long may she wave—o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave."

"I should think the old lady would look queer that way."

Arlie stared.

"Look queer—that way! What old lady?" he stammered.

"Your mother. By the way, how old is she?"

"Seventy-four."

"Rather undignified position, don't you think for a woman of her years?"

"Rather undignified? Say—what are you talking about, Obie?"

"Your mother. You said 'I've sent my good old mother (the money) out in the United States of America, and long may she wave o'er the land-of-the-free-and-the-home-of-the-brave. I'd not want my mother to be waving that way at her age.'"

Arlie winked rapidly.

First he was inclined to get angry. Then he decided he would not.

"You bally idiot," he cried. "Obie Darned, you're 'in wrong.' I meant that the American Flag should wave long, not my mother."

"Well, when you mean 'flag' don't say 'mother.' You remind me of the man who carried a watch. This watch was always wrong. 'I know by it' said the owner of the watch, 'that when the watch indicates twenty minutes past ten it's really a quarter of four o'clock.' Now, your remarks about the flag, and your aged maternal parent are like the owner of the watch—no one would know what was meant by watch or words but yourself. Don't mix your metaphors."

"Or split my infinitives. That reminds me of a newspaper I once saw. They were so careful about spilt infinitives that they forgot all about news. There never

was a split infinitive in their paper; nor was there any news."

"What's a split infinitive?"

"I don't know—but I think it was something that happened to Gil Burgos when I nailed his hand to the cards he had cheated to get into his hand."

"I'll bet he has a sore hand to-day."

"I hope so. I think I got that Bowie knife right through the center of his hand."

"Which hand—the one he wrung in on you or the hand you nailed to the board with your knife?"

"Suit yourself. Either hand you wish."

"Look here, Arlie, you've made a mistake."

"What is it?"

"You ought not to have taken that course to unmask that infernal trickster."

"Why not? What course should I have taken?"

"You should have let him have it from your gun. Then it would have been all over. Now, it's just begun."

"What has just begun?"

"Your fight with the outlaw."

"Humph!"

"That's all right! Make light of it if you wish. But man, it's a dangerous game you're up against. Do you think that Gil Burgos will let you get away with that game of yours?"

"Poof!"

"Scout at my word if you wish. But you know, man, that there *the outlaws drag-net* has already been cast for you—Gil Burgos will never rest until either you or he is under the sod."

Arlie shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, what of it?"

"A good deal of it. You lost a chance, you overstayed your market when you didn't kill the thug. Cheating at cards is serious out here where men gamble so much. Had you shot and killed the villain, there would have been nothing more to do. Public opinion is now with you. It was then. It would have been after you'd snuffed out that thug's life. Now you are marked by Gil and his band. They'll have your life, man, for how can you, alone, fight a gang of fifty outlaws?"

"Threatened men live long."

"That don't listen good to me. Many a man has filled a cold and unpleasant grave because he bolstered himself up with that thought."

Arlie's face was grave at length.

He began to see his danger.

"Is there any talk in the village about this—ah, little mix up!"

"Any talk? Nothing but talk."

"What's the general opinion?"

"Just as you've given it. Men say you're doomed. That you don't get a look in now, and that any moment you may be killed."

"That's rather of a lugubrious outlook."

"Somewhat."

"What do people seem to think I had ought to do?"

"Stop buying wine to celebrate your victory in—for other people."

"Well, I don't drink wine myself, you know."

"That's the foolish part of it. You are cornering all of the visible supply of champagne in the village of Fort McPherson. There's not enough champagne left here to give a decent drink to a man. A fur-buyer in the hamlet from the States, tried to get a bottle of wine and found it was now quoted at fifty dollars a bottle. The regular price is ten dollars."

"Have I been paying fifty dollars a bottle for wine?"

"No. But you've had it sold to you from ten dollars a bottle up to sixteen."

"Phew! And I haven't drunk a drop myself."

"Well, if you haven't every one else has. Of the male population here in this place every blooming man has been for, in some cases the first time in their lives, in a state of hilarity on the champagne you've bought."

"Gracious! Ain't that great? I never thought to live to get a whole town on a bat."

"Not only the town but the hogs have been drunk. I caught that old villain, Muskak, feeding his hogs with champagne, and charging it all up to you. There was one fat hog who sat up and took his toddy like a man. He was putting away his fifth bottle. All the rest of the pigs in the pen were so drunk they couldn't even squeal. This old chap was looking for more."

"I'll bet that chap was from Chicago. Boy, they can drink more of other men's booze in Chicago, for nothing, than any other town I ever heard of."

"Well, Chicago ain't no worse than New York—and they seem to be pretty clever out here in absorbing free booze. Now, Arlie, what did you do it for?"

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to run for office here."

"Eh?"

"So I'm buying some cheap popularity."

"Oh."

"You may say it's expensive popularity."

"Yes?"

"Now you see this cash nearly all—in fact all—came from the outlaw."

"Yes."

"It's my winnings. I'm spending."

"I suppose so."

"Then there's the cash I started on—the twenty-five thousand."

Obie looked around carefully.

He moved up closer to Arlie.

"Arlie, where did you get it?" asked Obie.

"Get what?"

"The twenty-five thousand that you started in that

game with. Here we are friends for life. Now, up to this game I never saw you have more than a few hundred dollars together in my life."

"I never did have."

"Then where did you raise that *twenty-five thousand dollars*?"

Before answering Obie, he pulled out wad after wad of bills from every pocket in his clothes.

After some labor he had counted apart a package holding some twelve thousand five hundred dollars.

This he shoved into Obie's hands.

"There," remarked Arlie. "We are now quits."

"Quits?" gasped Obie, his face white and his eyes glistening.

"Surely."

"Do you mean this money is for me?"

"I do."

"Where in thunder did you get it?"

"I got it—of the dead man, whose hand pointed us that warning."

Arlie said these words slowly. Obie slumped down upon a near by log.

"Was this money in that dead man's pocket?"

"It was."

"Did you know the dead man?"

"I did."

"Who was he?"

"Bill, the Kidnapper."

"The thug? The member of Gil Burgos' band?"

"Yes."

"Thunder!"

Obie soon returned to his questions.

"What do you suppose he was murdered for?"

"Don't know—but I'm going to find out."

"How?"

"Can't puzzle it all out yet. But I'm going to find out."

"I'll bet Gil killed him, cut his hand off and stuck it up there as a warning."

"I don't know. All I do know was that when I examined that body back at Mackenzie Isles, I saw that the dead man had been shot in the back of his head."

"Murdered. And who ever did it was in such a hurry to nail up his hand that they forgot to search him."

"Seems so to me."

"Then you were playing against Gil with his own gang's money?"

"Sure. I never had any money to speak of that belonged to me."

Obie tittered. The titter grew into a laugh that rang round the woods.

Suddenly Obie sat up.

"But man, did you ever stop to think of what's coming to you from the outlaws when they hear that you played with their leader with his own cash, and nailed his hand to a gambling table with a knife because you

caught him trying to cheat you to get back his own money—why if this story gets out Gil will have to jump the country."

"Why?"

"Ridicule is a worse weapon than a revolver. Gil may stand up before a revolver, but the storm of laughter that will sweep over every sporting resort, when that story gets out, will hurl him out of the country."

"Can't the country get along without Gil?"

"You gamble it can. But, man, Gil can't get along without this country."

"Why not?"

"This is about the only part of the North-West where he can carry on his game. Judge Lynch has made it pretty frequent for a good many others of his stripe hereabout. He might 'get his' some day."

"Well?"

"Nothing, except it proves that Gil will get to you as quick as he can so as to stop your mouth from telling a story that will excite laughter whenever his name is mentioned."

"Likewise Gil will try to get you?"

"I suppose so."

"I think we must go a Gil hunting on our own hook. I suppose I had not ought to have let Gil escape. But Lordy, Obie, it was such a good chance to show up the blooming thug, I just couldn't resist."

"What's your plan?"

"We came back here from where that dead man lay, after we buried the poor devil to hunt out Gil Burgos, and now we are here, we must continue the hunting process—"

"Especially as we have let the outlaw slip through our fingers."

"Dry up."

"All right. Here we go! I'm ready."

"Steal quietly down to our canoes, boy. We must hustle to Mackenzie Isle and fight that bandit until he or we two are in our graves."

Arlie and Obie dipped their paddles deep in the water of Mackenzie River.

Their frail canoes darted away on the mission of death.

How would the journey end? Was it a journey to their graves on the part of these two brave reckless men?

CHAPTER V.

A GIRL'S DARING.

The snarl of a wild beast started the echoes flying in the forest.

A fierce wild-cat, its eyes blazing with hatred, its tail twitching as it crept snarling along in stealthy hatred, wormed its hideous body through the underbrush, while right in front of it, its quivering ears pointed backward and its body atremble with fright pranced a magnificent big bay horse.

The horse bore a beautiful girl.

She wore the typical riding costume of a woman of the North-West.

Her divided skirt was jaunty and well made. It was of dark green cloth.

The girl rode astride.

Her tiny feet, in a pair of tan boots now and then drummed at the side of her frightened horse.

A keen spur now and then made the animal bound forward or a slight pressure of a white hand on the cruel Spanish bit in the animal's mouth made it rear and plunge backward.

Now the wild-cat is ready for its spring.

Its powerful legs crouched all together under its body.

It stood like a great cat for one second and then with a scream that made the forest ring again it launched itself directly at the girl and the horse.

The beautiful black eyes of the maiden flashed with laughter. Her round, rosy face was wreathed with a mischievous smile.

As the cat spun itself into the air for its bound, the girl wheeled sharply to the left.

The wild-cat saw the motion.

It attempted to change its direction in mid air. It only succeeded in sprawling out as it fell to the ground after its tremendous leap coming down with a thump that left it breathless for a moment.

When it recovered it was to see its tormentors, the woman and the horse, still whirling around it in a circle.

The wild-cat's fury returned.

Again it crept forward.

Once more it whirled upward in its leap.

Foam shot from its jaws.

Its great claws flashed out of its sheath-like feet. It again tried to reach the horse or the girl.

A quick jump to the left on the part of the horse saved itself and its rider.

The wild-cat spat and hissed at its foes in abortive anger.

The girl snapped her fingers at the deadly gleaming eyes of the cat.

"That's right, Miss Cat," her soft voice cried. "Try it over again. I hate to see such a beautiful creature as you, fall before a horse—and a woman's wiles."

The taunting laugh of the girl rang again and again.

This time the cat launched itself with fierce determination.

Horse and girl now stood like a statue.

The girl's arm was extended.

A revolver shone in the morning sunlight.

There was a trail of smoke and flame.

A sharp report sounded.

The wild-cat in mid air, relaxed.

It tumbled to the earth with a bullet through its head, dead ere its lifeless body was at the height of its spring.

"Poor devil," cried the girl as she looked down upon the beautiful body of the dead cat. "Why can't you understand that you have no chance when you attack a woman in these woods."

A chuckle made the girl turn her head.

There stood a tall, broad shouldered handsome young man, whose brown eyes were gleaming with mirth.

The girl noticed that the man's rifle was poised as if he had been ready to shoot at the wild-cat had she missed.

The man showed his white teeth in a broad smile.

"Well, you got him," he remarked nodding his head at the dead cat.

The girl gave the man an unwinking stare.

"Who are you, pray?"

"A faun?" replied the man.

"Oh," answered the girl. "I've heard of you. You're one of those protecting dieties in Roman Mythology, supposed to look after shepherds and agricultural gentlemen."

"Yes."

"There's not much agriculture out here, and there's no shepherd about us that I've ever heard of. If you're a faun you're certainly out of a job."

"Precisely. Yet at that I might be one of those woodland dieties."

"No, you don't measure up to the part."

"Why not?"

"Your feet and ears should be those of a goat to be a real faun. You're not that way—you're quite presentable."

"Thank you."

"Oh, don't mention it."

Man and girl laughed.

"In Arcadia Diana wore her long hair floating down her back," continued the young man.

"I need all of mine to cover my rat."

"Diana also used to be shown drawing an arrow from her quiver, while she held a struggling deer with the other hand."

"I traded my arrows for a revolver—a sprite stole my deer and then traded him off for a wild-cat."

"But you are still the tall handsome goddess, Diana the patron of hunting and all sylvan sports."

"Sir Faun, what an up-reaching young man you are. A double-barreled compliment that, truly. First you hit my marksmanship; then you say I'm a handsome young woman. Sir, you are a complimentary faun."

"But if your name isn't Diana I'm willing to hear it."

"How sweet of you. And I'm willing to tell it. It's Helen Vernon."

"Not Helen of Troy?"

"No. Helen of New York."

The girl looked directly at the young man.

"Now then, what is your name?" she asked.

"Arlie Thanet."

"Nice name—quite as nice as Sir Faun. But what is your business?"

"A trapper and gold-hunter."

"Does trapping and gold-hunting bring you here?"

"It does."

"Has it paid you?"

"Yes. For did it not bring me to your side?"

"Neatly put. A trapper and gold-hunter that can turn golden compliments is a rarity in the North-West. I must imprison you and take you back to my father's camp near here. He loved all his life rare things, in man or beast."

"Where do you put me—in the list with the men, or the beasts?"

"Heavens, young man! I don't know yet."

"Do all you New York girls flirt this way with a wild-cat?"

"Not all. This girl does."

"Don't you think it a dangerous sport?"

"Not always. It ended dangerously for yonder cat."

"You ride well!"

"Thank you."

"But little comedies like that, these early dances with a wild-cat as your partner some day might end in disaster."

"I suppose it was foolish. That animal—well, that cat is dead. Long live a good revolver. Poor Diana! How her nose would be out of joint here in these beautiful woods."

"She wouldn't last five minutes here with only a quiver of arrows."

"What an analytical young man! You are a prince of trappers!"

"But tell me about yourself?"

"How nice of you again. Is there anything so interesting to talk about as one's self?"

"You are a philosopher."

"No, only a New Yorker."

"That amounts to the same thing."

The girl nodded.

"It does require philosophy to leave these great wonderful woods, and live in New York in a flat."

"Do you live in a flat—Diana in a flat! Ye gods of mythology!"

"Well, there are worse things than a flat."

"I never heard of them."

"You must have lived in New York."

"I decline to sob out the story of my life."

"Very well. Then will you come to my father and be ticketed and catalogued."

"Eh?"

"My father comes out here every now and then. He chases all kinds of queer animals and then he goes back to New York and writes queerer books about the animals."

"First, tell me? Do you read the books?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Does any one?"

"Oh yes, father does. But he don't make it a pleasure. He is always swearing at the printer."

"Why?"

"He says the printer can make more trouble in one book than a wild-cat at a church picnic."

"Gracious!"

"Father says that some of the most beautiful descriptions he had ever written have been spoiled by a printer. For instance, once in one of his books he wrote, he says 'Immortal' and the printer spelled it 'Immoral.'"

Arlie smiled.

"Well, I'm sorry for your father."

"So am not I."

"Why not?"

"He is so busy studying bugs and beasts that he doesn't see anything at all of the beauties of these glorious woods. The other day I found a bug in my coffee. I started to take it out! 'For goodness sake don't kill that bug,' yelled father. 'It's a something or other with a long latin name. I must have him.' So to get the bug my coffee had to be sacrificed; and it was the last cup in the pot."

"That's the trouble with things—usually you don't lose anything until it is all you have left. It seems to be always 'the last cup in the pot.'"

"But after we get through swapping stories of our troubles, let us hurry to father. Father, I would have you know is a very learned professor of a whole lot of things. He is so learned that he is always in a fog. The boys at his college call him 'Foggy' Vernon."

The girl turned as she spoke and led Arlie down a steep bluff.

How her horse managed to retain his footing was a wonder. It made Arlie shudder to see the fine beast go down a declivity that he himself had to take care in negotiating.

But the active animal under the coaxing and fine judgment of the girl, essayed the dangerous steep in safety.

When all had reached the bottom Arlie breathed freer.

"You're a most remarkable young woman," Arlie said. "Some of these days if you coquette with wild-cats, and rush your horse down the sides of bluffs

into deep canyons, there'll be angels' wings buzzing around yours."

"My, but you are a pearl of young men. Goodness how neatly you compliment. I'm liable to pass hence escorted by 'the other angels' is the innuendo in your remark."

"I have always felt that my true position was in a pink-tea world," answered the trapper. "I would shine as a carpet-knight."

The couple smiled at each other.

"How long have you been bug-hunting?" asked Arlie.

"Since early spring."

"From whence did you reach this region?"

"We come from Fort Anderson over on the Jesup River."

"That's a good many hundred miles from here."

"Yes. But we have been a good many days getting here."

"Camp?"

"Do we camp? I should reply truthfully that we did. We have two tents for sleeping purposes, one for cooking, and storing, a hostler, a former King of Africa for a cook, and we had a guide—only he quit some time ago, and we have been guiding ourselves until we happened to meet a hunter who met us in the woods."

Arlie's face expressed blank amazement.

"You hired this unknown hunter, did you?"

"Yes, I don't like him either. He has a rather—well, a free sort of way with him, and although I have pointed out all this to father, well—er—father thinks I'm foolish."

"Hum."

The girl hesitated a moment. She seemed to want to communicate something but was debating whether to do so or not.

"How far is it to Fort McPherson from here?" she added irrelevantly.

Seeing that the question bore on some hidden thought Arlie answered without comment.

"About fifty miles."

"Why, our guide told us that it was nearly two hundred miles."

"He did?"

"Yes. There's one thing more. Yesterday morning I was up early. I took a stroll away from camp. I had a pen-knife in my pocket and I carved the initials of my name 'H. V.' on a tree."

"Yes."

"We travelled all day yesterday. We were supposed to have made at least twenty-five miles progress toward Fort McPherson."

"You should have easily made that much progress."

"When I rode out this morning, for father said he

did not want to travel to-day but was going to pass the time in cataloguing his bugs, I happened to pass that maple tree that you see ahead of you."

"I see it."

"I saw my initials 'H. V.', which I had cut the day before, staring at me in the face."

Arlie loosened the revolver in his belt quietly.

"Then your guide made you travel in a circle," he said. "Your guide is crooked. He has a reason for deceiving you. We must get to the impulses that will translate the reason for us."

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUIDE IS FOILED.

"Crooked? You mean that this guide we have is making us travel around in a circle and then tries to make us believe we are progressing toward Fort McPherson?"

Helen Vernon cried in terror as she spoke these words to Arlie Thanet, the young fur-trapper.

"That is exactly what I want you to believe."

"But for what purpose?"

"I don't know—robbery, possibly," replied Arlie.

"Robbery. We aren't worth robbing?"

"Then I don't know. All I can see from here is that you are being whirled around in a circle by your guide. You know this is so from the initials you cut in yonder maple-tree."

"I cut those initials myself, yesterday morning."

"The day after, when you supposed you had travelled all yesterday in the direction of Fort McPherson, you come smack against your initials once more. That makes the guide crooked on its face—may be he doesn't want to work himself out of a job."

"Father said he'd pay five dollars a day and grub until we got to the fort."

"That may be the reason for the circle-episode."

"It may be robbery?"

"Yes. Your outfit is pretty valuable I guess. Any crooked trapper might try to do you out of it."

"How?"

"Woods don't tell any secrets."

"Oh."

"He might murder you all for your outfit. Who would know where you were buried in these dense woods? No matter how careful the search, who would ever find your bodies?"

Helen was white with suppressed fear.

"Yes, and then, you see a murderer could use your kit in the trackless wilds about us and no one might ever come across him; no one might ever ask him how he came by the outfit, because he could bury himself in these North-West fastnesses and no one would ever even know he was on earth—girl, there are places up here that no human foot has ever pressed; lots of them."

The girl looked up at the towering mountains, the long expanse of gulches, canyons, the high bluffs.

"I can well believe it," she said. "We are lucky to meet you."

Arlie said nothing.

"I don't know anything about your guide. He may be all right. He may have meant all right and got tangled up and didn't know he was leading you in a circle. It looks bad any way. If he don't know his business he is just as dangerous as if he was crooked."

The girl marveled at Arlie's sagacity.

"He looks to me mighty near what I've thought a man ought to look like," Helen thought. "Whoever he is he is a man."

"She's a very pretty girl. What in the world did her fool father bring her out in these wilds for? There's too many wild animals, human and beasts, prowling around here."

When Arlie's thoughts had run their course he turned to the girl.

"Can you give me a description of the guide?" he asked.

"He is tall and broad-shouldered."

"That would answer for a description of a good many men out here."

"W-e-l-l-oh, yes, he has a black beard."

"Ah!"

Arlie was fooling with his revolver belt as he spoke.

"He has black eyes, shocky black hair."

Arlie straightened up.

In a sneering voice he spoke up, with a low swagger, making himself into a gun-bad-man of the territory.

"Talks like this, doesn't he?" Arlie questioned.

Helen nodded.

"You know him. Yes, that's the man. You imitate him exactly."

Arlie drew his revolver from his belt and began to examine carefully.

It was loaded and in fine condition.

The girl saw the motion.

"Why do you look at your revolver?" she queried.

"Not any great reason. Better know it's in good condition at all times. It is a North-West habit I have. We get so used to the knowledge that the gun is our only protection from human prowlers and animal prowlers, that every now and then we get ourselves ready for any possible trouble, by seeing that our guns are in good condition."

"Oh."

"How about the weapon with which you killed the wild-cat? A good shot at that."

"No more compliments. But this is a good gun."

Helen handed Arlie her revolver.

"I like it. It's a 45 Army gun; the best made. It carries some, doesn't it?"

"Shoot well?"

"Carries just a trifle high. But I'm used to it. I pull down on the mark a little. That counts!"

"I like a quick gun, with a dead center bead. Nothing like going right for the mark. These guns you have to calculate a little about, that shoot high or low, are as much a danger to you as they are to some one you are shootin' at. You see you have to calculate. That destroys your aim. Some times a faulty aim is your last aim."

"You are talking about shooting at another man. I don't want a revolver to shoot at another woman or man."

"There's not so much difference as you imagine in the shootin' game. A man may bristle with guns, and a wild-cat bristles with claws. Either, if they get to you, will put your light out. A girl who stood and gave that wild-cat his dose wouldn't be frightened at a gun-man."

"I don't know. I don't want to try at all events. But would you be willing to tell me your suspicions as to the identity of our guide?"

Arlie did not reply at once.

When he did it was with a well-modulated voice and a desire, the girl saw, to pick his words carefully.

"I don't want to say that I suspect whom your guide is," the young trapper answered. "The guide may be all right. If so the less said the sooner mended. But if you don't care I'd like to go to your camp and see your father. If all is well you don't need me. If it isn't, I guess you do."

Helen looked Arlie directly in the eye.

Something she saw there pleased her.

"Come," the girl answered.

Helen had been standing by her horse as she spoke.

She turned and walked through the woods in the direction of a smoke which told where her father's camp was situated.

On the way both man and girl were quiet.

Each was busy with thoughts of danger that might lie before them.

"There's father," the girl cried as she pointed to a tall spare man, with a thin, bearded face, and an abstracted air.

"This is Mr. Arlie Thanet," the girl said as soon as they had reached the camp.

"Happy to meet you," cried Professor Vernon.

He then looked at a book he was reading and promptly forgot all about Arlie.

"Father having emerged from the haze into which he had been obscured since he took up that book this morning," ventured Helen, "has now gone back behind the clouds. Come on—let's go and see the King of Africa at work."

"Here we are," added Arlie a moment later. "Goodness, what luxury!"

Arlie looked about in wonder.

Here was a large tent, apparently packed with good things to eat.

Almost as large as the tent, was a great colored man whose gleaming teeth shone from the blackest face Arlie had ever seen.

The colored man was cooking at a sheet iron stove.

Arlie sniffed.

"What's that thing?" asked Arlie.

"A stove."

"Oh."

"Didn't you ever see a camp stove before?"

"Never."

"Why, what do you people cook with up here?"

"Frying-pan."

"I don't mean the pan. I mean the fire."

"I'll show you."

Arlie called to the colored man.

"What's your name, you black rascal?" he cried.

There's a way of saying "black rascal" that hints of a substantial tip. Pompey Ducklegs knew that, so he told Arlie his name.

"Thunder, that isn't a name of a man it's the name of a tune," cried Arlie.

"Wall, dat's mah name, boss," cried Pompey deeply injured.

"No offense, Pomp. If that's your name it ain't my fault. One of the best families in America started from a man whose name was Preserved Fish. Owner of same was found floating on mattress in middle of ocean. Was then six months old. Couldn't tell name. Nothing to tell what ship had been lost at sea of which he was sole survivor, when or how. But a passenger on the ship that rescued the baby called him 'Preserved Fish.' He bore that name very honorably all his life, and there are many fishes yet in the human sea descending from this Preserved one."

"W-a-l-l, sah. Ah ain't goin' t' gainsay yah, but ah gues' ah got ma name from ma laigs. Thay's duck-legs shore."

They were.

Never was so much body held on such short supports.

"You're over-capitalized," remarked Arlie as he looked at the negro. "You're carrying too much water for your capital."

The girl smiled.

Arlie was sniffing suspiciously at the camp stove.

"Whatchur making?" he asked of Pompey.

"Flap-jacks."

"W-h-a-t! Oh, I say, this will never do. Pomp go get me some flour, baking powder, salt, and milk, quick."

Pompey obeyed.

With deft hands Arlie soon had his stuff kneaded into a concrete of dough.

While Helen watched him, admiring his tall easy grace, Arlie gathered a few sticks together.

Soon he had built a tiny but hot fire.

The flap-jack went sizzling into the greased pan.

In a moment or so it was done on one side.

Arlie with a supple motion of his arm sent the frying pan's contents whirling up into the air.

Up soared the flap-jack six, eight, ten feet in the air.

When it came down the frying-pan was underneath it.

In its aerial flight the flap-jack had turned over. Now it was getting "done" on the other side.

"Maple syrup, butter—that's the stuff, Pomp. Now, Miss Vernon, here we are—a meal for a goddess ready for you."

Helen thought it quite the best dish she had ever tasted.

"This is a flap-jack, eh?" she cried as the last mouthful disappeared.

"Them's him," cried Arlie ungrammatically.

"Delicious!"

"Good enough."

"That's the way you cook 'em?"

"Sure."

"Don't you have any more ceremony than that?"

"Why no. That's about all we need on a trip. Flour, bacon, a frying pan, and a good rifle. Why, Helen, there's enough game around here to drive an epicure crazy with desire."

"That's about all you need, isn't it after all?"

"Why of course. Good arms, plenty of ammunition, and there you are up in the great North-West."

"Delightful country to live in."

"You can live here as long as you please."

Helen blushed.

Her color added something to that in the face of Arlie.

Young blood moves swiftly.

Helen looked away toward the wood to recover her poise.

She shrank back as she did so.

"There's the guide," she whispered to Arlie.

He looked up.

Framed in a sort of oval of leaves from the branches of a large tree that partly shielded him, Arlie saw a man's vindictive sneering face looking at him.

The man was not fifty feet away.

The face was that of the outlaw, Gil Burgos.

CHAPTER VII.

A TRICK OF THE ENEMY.

Arlie jerked his revolver from his belt when the face of the outlaw was betrayed through its leafy screen.

"Gil Burgos!" he cried.

Arlie rushed toward the face.

But the outlaw's legs had carried his face away.

with the most sudden vanishment ever seen out of a transformation scene in a theater.

Arlie searched all around but nothing could be found of the bandit.

The surprising thing to him was that Burgos, whom he knew was perfectly fearless and brave, in spite of his bad reputation had not shot him from his shelter.

"Possibly he didn't want to have it known that he was masquerading as a guide," thought Arlie. "Possibly——"

Arlie stopped trying to fathom his bandit acquaintance's mind.

"I fancy I'm not deep enough," he thought. "No man can get down to the motives of that thug."

When he returned to Helen he found her smiling.

"I thought I was going to watch an exhibition of what do you call it—shootin'-up each other?"

"Gil Burgos don't shoot-up on the level," answered Arlie. "He is brave enough with a gun, but he is always looking for the best of everything from cards to guns."

While Helen didn't understand all that Arlie said she guessed much more than she knew.

"Who is that man—our disappearing guide?" she asked.

"His name is Gilbert Burgos better known as Gil Burgos."

"What is he?"

"A thug and outlaw."

"My. Aren't you afraid?"

"Not much. What is there to be afraid of?"

"Well a bandit isn't the nicest thing in the world, I should fancy."

"No, not the nicest. In this case we have trouble ahead."

"Trouble?"

"Much, I fear."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because I mean it."

"Why-y—we aren't in any danger are we?"

"In grave danger."

Helen did not turn pale. In fact she looked as if she absolutely enjoyed what Arlie had just said.

"How delicious!" she cried. "I always wanted to be in danger of death. It was a thrill I had never experienced. In this case it is perfectly entrancing. You haven't the slightest idea what a creepy feeling I have. I see the grave and myself, a cold, cold corpse, being lowered into it—delicious!"

Arlie laughed.

"You're a brave girl," he said. "I like a girl who can stand up under trouble and danger and smile at it."

"What's the use of weeping? I suppose when I'm dead it won't make much difference whether I died

howling or died silent. I hate the howling kind, any way."

"Well, I'm hoping this won't be a die anyway. I think we can fight our way through this, but I want to warn you that we are going to fight some."

"You think this bandit, Gil Burgos, will make trouble for us?"

"Rather."

"Why?"

"You can't prove anything by me. I don't know why, but he has a reason."

"Oh."

"And what that reason is I can't guess."

"I don't see—your conversation reminds me of a sea of mud. You know it's mud even if you can't see to the bottom of it."

"An apt simile. This chap Gil Burgos is like mud. You can calculate on his being all mud, even if you can't see through it."

Helen gave a slight scream as she looked toward the woods while Arlie was speaking.

Arlie spun around on his heel.

There stood his stout, amiable chum, Obadiah Good, smiling and bowing.

"What's that?" asked Helen in a sifted tone.

"That Chinese idol with the googly-eyes, who nods like some demned Mandarin?" questioned Arlie.

"Yes," replied Helen.

"It passes by the name of Obie Good. Its home is the North-West; it lives on food, and it's hard to catch in its wild state. In the case of the specimen here before you, ladies and gentlemen, he has been thoroughly tamed and is able and willing to eat out of your hand, all you will give him," replied Arlie with the tone of a dime museum "Professor."

Then Arlie turned toward Obie.

"Talk up," he said, "don't you see the lady, Miss Helen Vernon, is anxious to hear you speak?"

Obie bowed gravely.

"Isn't the specimen Miss Helen Vernon has secured in you about stopped her appetite for collecting freaks?" asked Obie.

"I can make room for you," cried the girl.

Obie grinned sheepishly.

"Thank you," he said.

"Where's our traps?" asked Arlie.

"In our canoes."

"Where are the canoes?"

"In the river under the sheltering shade of a tree that juts over our river, and which likewise juts over our boat. So between the two juts our traps are safe—from Gil Burgos."

"Have you seen Gil?" asked Arlie anxiously.

"W-e-l-l—not exactly seen him. I glimpsed him as he rushed through the forest as if the devil was after him. I then thought that possibly you and he had re-

duced your little argument to gun-play, and I cached our boats 'neath the shade of an old maple-tree' and hurried here. I had expected to find you shot full of holes. But I find you here shot full of arrows which a certain urchin named Cupid——"

"Oh shut up," cried Arlie.

"Really, Mr. Good, we've not got as far as that," cried Helen. "Mr. Arlie hasn't complimented me only about forty times, and all that sort of thing. Cupid can hang up his bow now. We have no use for it."

"Miss Helen, I warn you. You're in danger. This young man, Arlie Thanet, is a rusher. You don't stand a chance if he really decides to marry you. Not a chance in the world for you, if Arlie makes up his mind——"

The remark ended by a quick dodge on the part of the speaker to avoid a frying pan which Arlie threw at his head.

"Drop that," Arlie cried. "Let's all stop fooling. Gil Burgos is no laughing matter."

Obie grew grave in a moment.

"Sure," he cried. "There's no question that you are right. Gil Burgos is a danger that we must not forget."

Even Helen, who had the happy gift of not looking on any side but the bright one, laughed and then grew sober again.

"Well, shall we call father into our consultation?" the girl asked.

"No," rejoined Arlie. "We had better have no more in this than we have."

"What shall we do then?" asked Helen.

"We won't be attacked," Arlie replied, "for some hours. If you don't care I'll hold a little confab with Obie."

"Which means that I am dismissed," the girl answered. "I will go and talk bugs to father."

When Helen had gone Arlie turned to Obie.

"Fine trouble ahead, eh?" he said.

"Let me in. I don't see what you are driving at."

"Well what do you suppose I found here when I happened to meet that girl in the woods?"

"Don't know. Tell me?"

"I found Gil Burgos here acting as a guide to this party of tenderfeet."

"The dickens you did?"

"I did."

"What's Gil's little game?"

"I don't know. He's up to some kind of devilishness, isn't he?"

"He certainly is."

"Well whatever it is we will have to meet it and checkmate him."

"We must."

"But how?"

"My advice is to wait until night. Then make our escape from here."

Obie looked up at the sun.

"It's now about the late afternoon."

"Yes."

"In a few hours it will be dark."

"Yes."

"There's one thing to do and do quick."

"What is that?"

"Break this camp."

"Well?"

"When you've broken it skip toward Fort Anderson."

"By river?"

"That's a good plan."

"I can think of none better."

"Nor can I."

"Shall we tell the girl the plan?"

"Better consult with her. She's after all the boss with her daddy of this old camp."

"Right you are."

Arlie turned to walk toward camp to tell Helen of the discovery.

But before he could move, Pompey Ducklegs, his face white as most white men, despite his terrible agitation which was betrayed in every movement, came running toward him.

"B-o-s-s," stammered the negro. "They's suthin' to pay."

"What is it?" cried Arlie.

The negro with his eyes like peeled onions had great difficulty in speaking. Finally he managed to talk.

"Our hawsses is missin'," he cried.

Arlie ran to where all of the horses belonging to the camping party had been staked out.

"By thunder!" he cried. "They are missing."

A thought struck him.

"Hey, Obie," he called. "Run back to the river and see if our canoes are safe."

Obie disappeared in the direction of the river.

In a few moments he returned.

His face was filled with an expression of consternation.

"The canoes are missing," he faltered.

"Trapped!" cried Arlie. "They've trapped us. We have got to fight the outlaw band now, on their own ground."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OUTLAWS TRY A SCHEME.

Gil Burgos after running away from the camp of Professor Vernon did not go far.

He dodged into the woods and turning on his heels in a short time came to a point where he saw a short, under-sized man, but whose great breadth of shoulders

showed his strength, standing under a tree smoking a big pipe.

This man was Jozsef Martino, a Hungarian-Italian, a queer combination of races that came from his Hungarian mother and his Italian father.

He, next in rank in the Burgos band, was awaiting the arrival of his chief with what patience his small stock mustered.

He cried in a loud, growling voice to Burgos when he saw him at a distance.

"Here I am," he said.

"So am I," returned the outlaw chief, as he hurried along.

"I see you are here," replied Martino, who was usually known, however, as Jozse.

"Well?"

"Not much of anything."

"Hum. Did you stampede that old gink's horses?"

"Yes."

"That's good. Did you pinch the canoes of that—Thanet?"

"You bet."

"Well, I fancy we have them hemmed in."

"Not only hemmed in but sewed up in a bag."

"Good. I'll——" foul oaths ended the remark.

"I don't see why you are taking so much pains."

"You don't eh?"

"No I don't."

"If you want that girl why don't you take her, marry her, and shoot up her dad. What's she goin' to do then? If she squeals on you, ain't you her hubby? That won't bring you anywhere but in jail and a squeal won't bring her father back. I'd like to know the woman that will squeal on her husband, after she's once married to him."

"Married to her? Not I. I'm not looking for trouble. What I want is the spondulick. I'm looking for cash."

"Think you can get it out of that gink, eh?"

"Naw."

"How then?"

"Say, you fool, that old dotard Vernon is 'Foggy' Vernon of the University College."

"What in thunder is a 'Universal College'?"

"It's a new high-brow game."

Jozse passed his hands over his eyes as if to shut out a frightful scene.

"Why you —— old idiot. You are gettin' worser than ever. See? Wot in —— is a high-brow?"

"A high-brow is a holier-than-thou person who won't let one man do what he allows another one. They are painful persons who have a 'mission' on this earth which they say will 'up-lift mankind' and which others say is an eternal attempt to make other people see things the way they do."

"Gosh! Did ye make all o' thet outen yar own head?"

"I did."

"Wall ef I see a 'high-brow' outen hyear, I'm a goin' to shoot him up right offen the reel. Ye bet yer."

"Well, 'Foggy' Vernon, is a 'professor' in the high-brow college I told you of East—in the States, ye know."

"Well what of it! Nawthin' in thet fer us."

"Don't be so sure. The college was founded by men with millions. They set great store by old 'Foggy,' who is indeed something of a man in his chosen field."

"I don't want no letter o' reccimendation frum thet thar collidge fer yer frien' 'Foggy.' Wot yer givin' me?"

"Oh, nothing, except those millionaires will give a whole lot up to have 'Foggy' back after he is held for ransom in 'that awful North-West.'"

"Oh, ho! Thet's a talkin' some. Say, thet's why ye were a actin' as guide fer thet outfit?"

"Right you are the first guess. I had it all fixed to lead that outfit away for a spell. Played the going-around-in-a-circle cat on them. Then I was going to get 'em separated so I could shoot that nigger cook of theirs then separate the gal and her dad."

"Then wot?"

"I'd lure 'em up to our camp. But I wouldn't be seen at all. My plan was to divide the gang, have them held prisoner with one crowd, while I hurried off to the Fort and waited till some one came from the East willing to put up big ransom."

"How long do ye think ye'd had ter wait about Fort McPherson for someone to cum over wit de cash?"

"Oh, about a month. I was going to write back to the college, see?"

"Hee! Hee! Good leather. Good scheme. You'd write back that ye were holdin' the two fer ransom."

"Sure. When the ransomer came out I'd be the one to meet him and treat for the release. You bet, old pal, I'd see they come over hard."

"Good scheme. But what queered it?"

The outlaw burst into a train of oaths.

"That fellow Arlie Thanet spoiled the trick on me."

"How?"

"He must needs show up with the gal. The moment he spotted me he was wise. I had to jump."

"Say yer nutty. W'y didn't ye gin' him a shot outen the bushes. Why man yer dippy. Say, you ain't no born leader."

"That will be about all for you," shouted the chief outlaw. "I'm good enough to lead chumps like you. Say, I'd looked pretty tryin' to pull this over after the gal got on to me—now wouldn't I?"

"Ain't they on to you now?"

"Not so awfully. They each know now because the two dunder-heads have been comparin' notes that I'm

the guide and the outlaw all in one. They expect to git attacked by us, but I can fool the girl back into some confidence in me if I get a fair whack at the feller in the way, that Arlie Thanet."

"Say yer dippy. You ain't got a chanst in the woild. Thet couple is on ter ye bigger then a house. You don't cut no ice with them an ye never will. My advice to ye is to come out hard. Take a crack fust chanst ye git at this hyear Arlie. Then ye better git his chum, Obie, and then ye takes the gal and old 'Foggy' her dad, and lock 'em out somewhere on one o' them thar Mackenzie islands hyear abouts an' then——"

"Oh let up you old windmill."

"An' then ye kin git some ransom offen them high-brows just the same-y. You'll go bust ef ye keeps on the way yer runnin' this yar game. See!"

"Oh shut up! Say you're worse than a phonograph. Why, you old snake, you haven't got enough sense to see over your moustache. Shut up I say. My plans goin' to win yet."

"Like——"

"Now stow that. You've gone far as I allow. Don't you try to kick up no trouble on my plans. I can get to the center with my chips quite quick enough."

"How did ye hurt yer hand?" jeered Jozse. "Better not play with thet Arlie Thanet again, at the gamblin' or the fightin' game."

The effect on Gill was startling.

He turned red and pale by turns.

Then he smote Jozsef right between the eyes with his great fist.

The second in command of the bandit gang fell as if he had been hit by a battering ram.

He was stunned by the blow and laid on the ground a mere wreck of a bandit.

He had joked with his chief too often.

Bestowing a contemptuous kick on the body of the prostrate man, Gill strode away and jumping into a canoe that stood on the strand, hurried off on some secret mission.

Jozsef Martjino did not come to himself for several minutes.

At length he sat up with a feeble groan.

"He! He!"

A feeble and suppressed laugh struck his ears as he groaned in the agony of sore muscles, and felt of his eyes which he knew were blackened by the fell blow he received.

The laughter brought the outlaw back to himself.

He whirled in his tracks and gave a snarl of rage.

A man stood near him.

The thug swept his hand to his left hip for his revolver. But he only grasped a holster, empty, and of absolutely no use in the present stress.

"Here's your gun," muttered a low voice with a note of laughter in it.

The outlaw looked up.

Yes. It was his gun!

But the muzzle pointed toward him.

The handle was in the hands of a fat little man, whose snapping blue eyes looked exceedingly dangerous.

"Here's your gun!" added the voice. "Want its contents?"

Jozse held his hands above his head.

There was no argument left for him.

He had no gun; the other fellow had his gun, and meant to shoot when he levelled it at the head of the outlaw.

That is if Jozse did not hold up his hands.

So, not awaiting any command of that kind, Jozse "held up his hands."

"Very good! Very good, indeed! You are a true North-West man. A hint's as good as a kick."

Jozse only snarled like a wild beast.

"Now don't get savage. I treat angry passions in man or beast with a lead pill—ah, ah, don't put down those hands."

The outlaw almost cried in his rage.

"What a delicious face. My but you're a sweet thing! What would I not give for your photograph?"

The outlaw this time said nothing. But he gave the speaker an eloquently vindictive look.

"What would you not give to me if you had the chance, eh?" purred the soft voice. "Do you know me?"

No answer.

"Do you know me?" came the question this time without a soft drawl but like the snap of a whip.

The outlaw saw that it was time to quit.

"I know yez," he sulked.

"Well, what's my name?"

"Obadiah Good."

"Right you are. Now I'm going to tell you what your name is."

The outlaw looked his surprise.

"You're Jozse, the Brute, second in command to about the most ornery skunk these diggings afford, one Gil Burgos."

The outlaw nodded.

Obie Good stopped as if he wondered just what he ought to do next. But he was careful to keep his weapon trained on the outlaw's head.

Good happened along by chance just as Jozse was coming out of the trance into which the fist of Gil Burgos had thrown him.

Obie grasped the opportunity.

He pulled the outlaw's weapon from its holster when the thug was insensible. Then he thought what a good

joke it would be to train the weapon on the bandit and thus hold him up with his own gun.

The thought was father to the deed.

The bandit awoke to find his gun holding him up!

"You see," added Obie when he got these facts spread in plain language before the outlaw after some pains on his part, "now my partner, Arlie Thanet had the honor of nailing your cheating leader's hand to the table back in Fort McPherson, so I've decided it's up to me to hold up the next in command with his own gun."

"Wall wot ye want?" hoarsely cried the outlaw. "Wot ye doin' all this plavarin' fer? Ef ye's goin' to shoot, w'y don't ye do ut? Stop this talkee-talk. Ye makes me sick."

"Bravo! Bravo;" cried Obie. "This thug is ready to die with his boots on. Say, you're a reg'lar North-West gun man. You don't care a—well you know what and why, you don't care—you know what, whether I know you don't care or not."

"Shet up," cried Jozse now thoroughly disgusted. "Shoot away."

Obie laughed.

"How'd ye like to make five thousand dollars?" he asked.

The outlaw jumped as if shot.

"Would you?" coaxed Obie.

"Sure."

"Well, I know a way."

"Wot is et?"

Obie leaned forward.

"It's to sell out Gil Burgos."

The eyes of Jozse twinkled with rage.

He had not forgotten the blow that his leader had administered him.

"Is this good goods?" he said in his crow-like voice.

"Sure it is."

"Whar do I git the pelf ef I split on Gil Burgos?"

"Where do you want to get it?"

Jozse turned this over in his mind carefully. It would not do to take a bribe to betray Gil and remain near Gil.

That was too much like blowing one's brains out.

He couldn't stay in the North-West if he "split" on his gang. That would be foolish for if he left Mackenzie territory for any other North-West one there would be trouble for him; the outlaws would go a reasonable distance like a few thousand miles to kill a traitor to their band.

But in Texas? Ah, there was safety? Or in California?

"Would ye be willin' ter pay me thet cash at Fort Anderson—thet is ef we made a deal?" questioned Jozse.

"Any old place you say."

"Wot do I hez to do ter gits the munny?"

"Easy game. You tell me what there is behind that dead hand sign post on that island over there, and I'll tell you where you can get the money."

"Why, that dead hand," replied the outlaw, "holds the secret—now I ain't a-goin' ter tell ye yit."

"Why not?"

"Shet up. I'll meet ye here ter night ef ye ain't dead then. Hyar comes Gil Burgos in a canoe. See?"

Obie saw that the outlaw spoke the truth.

He hesitated whether he ought to kill Jozse where he stood.

But this seemed too much like downright murder although he knew if the positions were reversed that Jozse would have no compunctions as to what he should do.

"Well, I guess I'd better take a chance," cried Obie when he saw that Gil was stepping into a canoe across on the mysterious island where the dead hand was still nailed to a tree. "I'll be here to-night at 8 o'clock, Jozse," and thus speaking Obie vanished in the underbrush just as the canoe of the outlaw chief left the island of mystery.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE ATTACK.

Night came at length.

It had been a busy time for both Arlie and Obie all the afternoon.

For reasons of his own Obie had not told Arlie of his understanding with Jozse and he had cogitated with himself quite a good deal as to the course he had better take.

Finally he made up his mind that he would tell Arlie of his chance meeting with Jozsef.

Arlie had caused the tents to be struck and had moved the Vernon camp a mile further within the woods so that in case of an attack he would have a different environment in which to face the outlaws from the one in which Gil Burgos had acted as guide.

"You see," Arlie explained to Helen, "here where we were first the outlaw knew his ground. He had selected a place where an attacking party had all the best of it. Where we are going we will have the advantages of a good position. When you're going to fight it's always better to pick the battle ground yourself."

A smile of sly roguery came into the girl's face.

"Your Napoleonic strategy commends itself to me. You see, Napoleon knew the advantages of attacking an enemy on the ground old Nap selected."

"Was that chap a North-West man?" asked Arlie innocently.

At first Helen thought Arlie was jesting but when she saw that he was in earnest Helen's merriment was increased.

"Well-I-I n-o," she replied after awhile. "I'm afraid Nappy wasn't well known in these parts."

"He must have been something of a soldier to pick his ground, any how," returned Arlie. "Well, we will try his game and see how we come out."

Arlie then trekked with his party to a spot which he said "was made for a good scrap."

He was right.

A space in the woods had been cleared by Dame Nature herself.

There was a craggy hill, rocky and sombre, in the center of this clearing.

Around the hill was a lot of dry underbrush, but as Arlie pointed out, it would be impossible to set it on fire without coming under the zone of the rifles of his party.

"They could make it merry for us," Arlie added, "if they could set that dry underbrush on fire. But to do that they will have to creep over that open space. I'll wager that no man can do that in the face of our rifles."

Helen nodded.

Her fine intelligence showed her that Arlie spoke the truth.

"What shall I do with the luggage?" gasped Obie who, with Pompey Ducklegs, and Arlie was well weighted down with the camp equipage.

"Pile it all behind that rock on the summit of the hill."

Professor Vernon who had tried hard to get through his mind, which was very keen on the question of bugs but very hazy when it came to anything of an everyday nature, came up just then bearing a keg of powder.

"What shall I do with this powder?" he asked.

"Powder? For goodness sake what to you want with so much powder?" queried Arlie.

"Why we thought we might need it."

Arlie roared.

"There's one thing you don't have to carry in wholesale lots out here. We can get powder, shot, cartridges and whiskey most anywhere in the North-West at the timest hamlet," dryly put in Obie.

"When you get enough whiskey on board, you have use for plenty of the powder and shot, eh?" rejoined Helen.

"There isn't so much shootin' out here as you think," replied Obie. "Why Arlie here, doesn't kill a man every day."

Arlie stuck out his tongue.

"If you don't shut up I'll kill a man to-day at that," he cried.

"Never mind talking so much," said Helen. "You're encroaching on woman's especial prerogative. Not that there aren't women in trousers at that."

"We are set on! Let's get to work," replied Arlie. "Now then, boys, is everything moved from the camp?"

Pompey Ducklegs came forward at this point.

"I've brung every ting," he smiled with his white

teeth looking like a gash in a water-melon. "Dey ain nuttin' left back yonder. 'Cept them men wot I seen a peepin' out o' dar yar woods wen I come along here."

"Here's news," shouted Arlie. "These are fine times. We are right ready oh, for our scrap. Pomp here has sighted the outlaws. They'll be on to us soon, I will bet a cooky to a Chinaman's head."

"Unequal wagers are always barred in betting. No Chinaman's head out here that I ever saw was worth an orange," chuckled Obie.

"Well never mind. You're no sport or we would have made a bet long ago. A true sport nowadays bets on anything. Just goes in on his luck."

"I saw one tin-horn sport betting with a dead man's cash not long ago," growled Obie with a wink.

"Boy you talk too much. It's darned foolishness talking all the while. Give some other fellow a chance."

All the while the men were working like beavers.

They had piled all of the Vernon camp goods in the center of the rocky hill, and then had rolled stones around the pile, making a sort of rampart.

By kneeling down they could get a chance to shoot between the rocks.

"That's a mighty fine fort we have now," remarked Arlie as he paused to look over his work. "Would take some fine shooting to get through those rocks at us."

"Well there's going to be a chance soon to see what kind of a fort it is."

"What do you mean," replied Arlie when Obie had thus spoken.

Obie pointed to the fringe of woods that surrounded the place which they had selected for their battle ground.

From the woods could be seen a fringe of light.

"That's funny," remarked Arlie. "Are the bandits coming after us with torches? Why? it wants two hours to darkness."

Yet the lights were seen to be twinkling hither and thither.

"What in thunder is it?" asked Obie.

"It's something I can't explain," cried Arlie. "There seems to be a sort of fringe of light. Then the massed lights seem to disappear and rush hither and thither—"

"Look at the lights leap in the air," said Helen. "They seem to be advancing."

Professor Vernon even awoke from his fog.

"They are not any type of fire-fly that comes to these latitudes," he said.

"Never mind what they are, father," laughed Helen, "at least they are not your favorite bugs."

Even the Professor joined in the laugh.

"That's the spirit," cried Arlie. "Laugh when the game isn't ours is the best way to chasten your spirit."

"You don't believe in the 'pride goes before a fall' idea, do you?" said Helen.

"Not so anything you know of could notice if."

"Mistah Arlie dar cums them lights," shrieked Pompey at this juncture.

"Sure enough they are coming," cried Obie. "What in thunder are they?"

The lights now had separated and were not like a fringe.

There seemed to be hundreds of them.

Some ran along the ground spitting out little fiery points.

Others seemed to dart up high in the air.

Still others were seen to scutter through the grass which soon blazed up about them, and fanned by the breeze began to eat chunks of fire and smoke through the vegetation here and there.

"Whatever they are they seem to have set the woods on fire," remarked Arlie. "That won't hurt us much for the flames can't find much to feed on about us here."

"The rains of last week have left the woods pretty soggy," put in Obie. "I don't think there's any danger that the flames will back-flare into the woods and do much damage."

Even as he spoke the flames died out in the underbrush.

But the queer spectral-like dots and flashes of flames continued darting hither and thither.

"Gosh! Here comes a new supply," shouted Obie at this juncture.

While he spoke there came flying over the vacant spots between the woods and the camp a myriad of flames.

Now and then there came a dozen jets of fire that rose in the air, sailed forward a bit, and then rose again.

"Ye Gods!" howled Arlie suddenly. "I'm on at last. Back to the camp every one and try to bury that powder. If you don't we will all be blown to atoms."

"Huh?" was all that Obie could say.

"The outlaws have caught hundreds of the jumping mice that infest this country," shouted Arlie.

"What of that?"

"You know all about the jumping mice, don't you?" Arlie added.

"I know there's a lot of mice that jump in the air with surprising activity when pursued in the North-West," replied Obie. "They are common enough all through the Hudson Bay region, and I've seen millions of them about here."

"The bandits have caught a large number of these jumping mice, and have dipped each one in kerosene. Then they have lighted the kerosene, and have turned the burning mice loose in hopes that they would rush over to our camp and set us on fire before they were burned to death."

Arlie Thanet had hardly spoken these words when hundreds of the fiery mice scattered into the camp.

"The powder! Don't let them get near the powder!" yelled Obie as he began thumping right and left at the squealing, flying, dying, tortured mice with the butt of his rifle.

Helen rushed back toward the powder barrel.

CHAPTER X.

POMPEY DUCKLEGS MAKES A HIT.

The blazing, jumping mice swarmed into the camp.

They seemed to be everywhere.

They came by the hundreds.

As Arlie killed the miserable, squeaking, little things, his heart was sore within him.

"To torture these poor things," cried Arlie to Obie, "makes my blood boil!"

Obie who was hitting out valiantly nodded.

"How do you suppose they did it?" he asked.

"They must have trapped the things by the hogshead," replied Arlie.

"Then they dipped them in crude petroleum and set them on fire."

Even in his busy moment Arlie couldn't help laughing.

"You darned fool," he cried, "how long do you think it would take the outlaws to light up a hogshead full of mice?"

Helen laughed merrily although she was in imminent danger.

The rushing mice had set her short-skirted riding gown on fire time and again, but she had managed to extinguish the blaze.

Then she grabbed a rifle and began clubbing diligently right and left.

Professor Vernon had been so busy in Bugland lore that he had not at first sensed the situation until there came to him a couple of dozen of the squealing mice, all ablaze.

One ran up his leg and crossed over his hand and darted back to the earth.

He made a seared spot on the Professor's arm.

"What's this?" cried the Professor. "A mouse? And on fire? A flaming mouse? I must catch one and put him in my collection. I never even read of a flaming mouse before."

The Professor managed to catch one of the tiny sufferers in his bug-net, as his daughter called it.

He eagerly looked at the dying tiny scrap.

"Why, it's only a tiny jumping mouse," he cried. "And covered with petroleum at that."

This was the nearest approach to slang that any one had ever heard the Professor use.

But now the Professor awoke.

With his "bug-net" grasped in his hand he sailed into the fray.

He scraped, scouped and beat off the mice by the dozens.

Never was so much valiant labor seen before in the way of an extermination of the mice breed.

The work of the Professor soon began to tell along with that of the rest of the party.

"Hurrah!" shouted Arlie. "The danger is over for the present."

He shook his fist at the silent woods from whence the mice had come.

"Send on some rats," he yelled. "Don't send a mouse to do a rat's work."

"Where's Pompey?" cried Helen as she vainly looked about for the colored cook.

But Pompey had disappeared.

"Oh, Pomp," cried Arlie.

A faint voice replied.

"Where's that nigger!" called Obie impatiently.

"Crawled into a hole," answered Arlie in a disgusted tone.

"No-o sah," sounded the voice of Pompey. "I'se ain' in no hole sah? I'se heah."

Helen looked about carefully but nothing could be seen of Pompey.

"Where's here?" she cried at length.

"Heah, Mis' Helen, right heah behin' them tents," came the slow answer.

The party rushed around the pile of tents.

There sat Pompey on something or other.

His fat body utterly hid the thing he was sitting on from view.

"You black rascal," cried Arlie in anger. "So here's where you're skulking, is it? You coward. You ought to have been with us fighting off those darn, blazing mice."

"Deed, Mistah Arlie," replied Pompey with immense dignity. "I'se goin' tah tell y'u that I'm no coward, sah. I cums frum the fust famblies o' ole Virginney an' I ain no cowar' sah."

"If you ain't a coward why are you here?" questioned Obie.

Obie felt sure this was an unanswerable statement.

"Wall, gennemen," added Pompey, with more dignity. "You all remembers dat powder?"

"Of course we do, Pompey. I yelled to have some one rush to it and bury it in the rocks as soon as I say the blazing mice coming. We might have been all blown to atoms if the blazing mice had got near that half open barrel."

"Dey want no dangah o' dat, sah?" replied Pompey with a great grin.

"Why not?" said Arlie.

"Deed sah, I'se havin' you all know that I'm sittin' on dat yar powder."

Pompey said these words with the air of a great conqueror.

A stunning roar from all startled the echoes in the distant woods.

The forest was lighted up by flame and smoke.

Arlie was the first to recover himself.

"It's the bandits opening fire on us," he shouted. "Look out for them. Crouch down. Fortunately, they shot high at the first fire."

The party crouched down and crawled back to the shadow of the rocky ramparts.

There they found Professor Vernon standing, deep in the persual of a book on his favorite pursuit.

"Was there not a noise?" he cried to the party as it returned. "It appeared to be coming from yonder woods."

As the atmosphere was heavy with the shrill notes made by many rifle bullets the remark somehow seemed superfluous.

"You get down here with us or you will be spitted by a bullet, worse than you ever spitted a bug by your retaining pins," remarked Arlie as he smiled at Helen.

Obie motioned to Arlie just then to crawl over and see him.

"Well?" Arlie asked a moment later.

"It is not well; it's ill," replied Obie.

"Did you have me crawl across the devil's angle of this place, where my body was exposed to a chance bullet to tell me this?"

"Oh no. I called you over to see if I could drive a little sense into your head or body, in case a bullet hit you. I might get some sense in the bullet-hole. I don't seem to get much now."

"I suppose that 'is spok sarkastic' as an American humorist put it. Now, having unloaded your bile on my devoted head, tell me what you have to say."

"We are penned in here."

"In original ideas, my boy, you simply scintillate."

"Thank you again and again. I was always noted in school for my brilliant ideas. One of them was when I bent a pin and placed it on my teacher's chair."

"Anything happen?"

"The same thing that happened when you failed to shoot Gil Burgos and instead nailed his hand to the gambling table."

"What was that?"

"The head teacher and Gil got away with it."

"Which means?"

"That the head teacher licked me."

"I suppose I am to infer that Gil is going to lick me."

"Hurrah! You're right, first guess. Your brains are working over time Arlie to get my meaning so easily."

"You didn't call me over here to swap stories with you?"

"Is there much else to do?"

"Why don't you get up and doff your hat, and in the polite tones you use when you yell 'fish' from your fish-wagon say, 'dear Mr. Outlaw,' come right in. Kill us all, help yourself to the young girl we ought to have protected, loot out camp and get hence to pastures new. I'm in a hurry, don't you know, and want to die quickly."

"Come off! You are getting me on edge."

"Good."

"Why?"

"When you're on edge there's a chance to get you in a cutting mood."

"Well, drive on."

"There isn't any sense in our replying with our rifles to all that hullabaloo in the woods the pirates are making."

"Not much."

"Every infernal villain is ensconced behind a log, engaged in trying to put a hole in the center of yon sickly moon, it seems, for every shot they are firing is going nearer the moon than it does us."

"This reminds me of the old style Chinese army which used to go into battle twisting the tails of numerous cats they carried and shrieking in queer medley to 'frighten the enemy in advance.' They were so busy twisting the tails of their cats that when they got to the enemy they forgot that they had no place in the enemies' ranks to attend to their cats, and so usually ran back from whence they came to care for kitty."

"You certainly are a humorist. Don't get to be one."

"Why?"

"I will try not to be one. But get ahead. What must we do?"

Obie thought deeply.

"This is my plan," he added. "I'm going to meet that fellow Jozsef Martino the assistant boss outlaw of Gil Burgos' outfit."

"Oh, the chap you told me some time ago you had something that you knew about, that you wanted me to know about—or that you—"

"Goodness what a mix up! I told you briefly that I had offered to bribe Jozse, as he is called mostly about here, with five thousand dollars, the same sum of the said five thousand dollars to be paid in hand to the said Jozse the Brute, in the Fort belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company, in the—"

"Hully Snakes! What a lawyer you would make."

Talk about a legal document? Your words smell of musty law-books."

"Well, then I'll tell my plans quick. First—will you stand for the bribe on a half-to-half game. Between us we've got twelve and one half thousand dollars. Five from twelve and a half—how much is it?"

"Enough to give us some monies when we get out to blow in. Here if we stay we will get killed and will know that the twelve thousand and one half has been blown in by the thugs—well, I'm game. I'll stake you for half the bribe money."

"Then we are a team—and a cross dog under the waggin."

"Next act?"

"And last! I'm goin' to crawl out and go the snake-act way to the trysting-place, deah boy, where I'll meet the deputy outlaw, Josze, the Brute, and see if he is bribeable."

"Do you mean tryst or slitting place?"

"I don't know. If Jozse is not on the level with me it means the throat-slit for mine; if he is on the level it's a trysting place for gold for him, and life for me."

"Pretty dangerous experiment, isn't it?"

"Certainly. It's not so darned safe here. I'll have my throat slit here if I stay any way; there's a chance that I may put my bribe over and save all our lives if I go."

"I suppose you're right. When do you go?"

"Immediately. You'd better put up a grand fancy firing exhibition as I start, to distract the attention of the f-o-e!"

"That is we will shoot and bang away like mad-men and under cover of the demonstration we will see you wriggle off to victory or death."

"Yep."

Arlie held out his hand.

"So long, old man," he said with his merry smile.

"Tra-la-la," cried Obie, with a wink.

That was all.

One man going to possible death; the other staying behind to the same chances of fate.

Yet they part with the few words of the kind when one parts from a friend in a peaceful city.

In the North-West death is a question often facing one that meeting and solving it gets to be only part of the day's work.

So under the roar of the rifles of Arlie and his party of beleaguered ones, Obie Good wriggled away through the underbrush to meet Jozsef Martino the outlaw.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MEETING IN THE WOODS.

"It's up to you. Take it or leave it."

"Jes' gin me time ter think it over."

Obie Good and Jozsef Martino, the Hungarian—Italian outlaw, stood face to face in a bower-like shelter in the depths of the forest removed, however, from the place where Arlie Thanet and his devoted band were facing the outlaws under command of their leader, Gil Burgos.

Yet the two men could hear now and then the boom of the rifles as each side to the deadly duel sent shot scurrying toward each other's battalions.

Obie had reached the spot where Jozse had agreed to meet him, wholly unharmed and undetected.

He found the outlaw, who had also stolen from his band, awaiting him.

"It's up to you any way," added Obie, after he had said the foregoing words, and had heard the outlaw's answer.

Obie sat down on a log, hitched his revolver forward in his lap and indifferently began chewing a bit of grass.

On his side the feelings of the outlaw could very easily be determined by the manner in which he chewed tobacco.

He crunched up such an enormous lot that even Obie stared. Such a general consumption would cause a tobacco famine almost immediately.

At length the outlaw spoke.

"I don't know wot ter answer ye," he said. "I ain't a goin' fer to say that yar offer means a lot ter me. I ain't ben doin' well with Gil fer quite a spell."

"Oh, bandit business suffering from financial stringency?"

"Naw. They's pelf enough goin' round ter them thet Gil likes but ye see I'm wot they's calls a wheel-hoss."

"A what?"

"A wheel-hoss. I'm one o' them unfortunate critters thet allus shows I'm ready ter pull the hull load. I'm looked erpon as a 'steady man.' I can pull me damned head off, while them leaders ef they git kittinish, why ain't they leaders put thar fer show? It's expected them fellers will bolt, and kick en snort, an' they's must be petted an' coaxed back inter the road. But ole' wheel-hoss Jozse, w'y ef he jest tosses his head he must get th' gad—he ain't nottin' but a wheel-hoss, a pullin' most o' the load, and he ain't got no call fer a kick."

Obie nodded.

"I know. There's some men must take their pay in compliments, while others get it mostly in blows. Then there's that sweet class of gold-bricks that don't have to get anything anyway but who have all the good things handed to them on gem-set platters although, confessedly, they are of no use except for show. See?"

"Thet's it. I ain't ther kind o' a man thet sells out his friends—but I ain't a seein' many friends a comin' down the pike in this hyear band. They's more enemies than' friends hyar."

"There doesn't seem to be much money in the game here for you—why not take some of my 'mon'?"

"Dunno now but I might? But the thing wots a stickin' inter me hat is how the thunderin' devils I kin git away wit it? I want th' mon, but I ain't lookin' fer ter git killed. I am ready ter tak the mon' but see—ef I do and it ain't ere given ter me quick, so I can skip outen hyar I'll git planted by Gil. He ain't goin' ter let nothin' stand in his way wen he thinks thet he's bein' split on."

"That's why the dead hand was put on the post over on the island there?" put in Obie.

A quiver ran over Jozsef Martino.

His eyes opened and shut violently.

"That's it," he cried, "thet feller was a member o' our band. He was jest suspected of er dispo-sition to split on the gang—say Gil, ast him ter go over ter the island in a canoe one day."

"Well?"

"That's all thet onny o' us know except thet his hand was found next day or two by some o' the boys who war over ter the island."

"It's finger pointed a 'beware' back toward Fort McPherson."

The outlaw shivered.

"I guess ye've been thar," he said. "My Gawd, man! Thet meant thet onny o' the gang that dared send any information ter any o' the au-tho-ri-tees et Fort McPherson, or anny one thet cums from that thar fort ter spy hereabouts would git his hand a stuck up under the dead hand o' one o' our band who tried ter gin up our secrets."

"Highly original way of enforcing two demands, on the part of Gil, wasn't it?"

"I dunno. I dunno ef that thar dead man knew onnythin' or he didn't. I only know that Gil gin him hissen."

"Did the man—what was his name?—give Gil any information?"

"Wot de yer mean?"

"Did the man tell Gil before he died anything as to what he had been doing?"

"Huh? Tell Gil anythin'? Say, he didn't hav no chanst ter tell annythin'. Gil shot him in th' back o' his head."

"Shot him in the back of the head? Just plain assassination, eh?"

"Yaas. Jest that. Gil told the band wot he'd done. Said the feller was shy twenty-five thousan' dollars."

"What?"

"Yep. Seems Gil sent the chap ter Fort Anderson ter ship the bank-bills out ter a chap in Shycago, who done business with Gil. The stuff went outen in a express package marked 'letter-postage, man'script.' No one would ever think that a man'scrip written by a feller could ever be bank-bills. So no one would git wise ter wot was a goin' through the mail. See?"

"Yes, I see. The bank-bills were shipped out as manuscript, and no one would suspect that so much cash was in the letter, for authors never could get twenty-five thousand dollars ahead to ship anywhere, in their lives."

"Yer on. Wall, et seems thet this yar dead outlaw—never mind his name, we ain't got no call ter bring thet up—didn't pro-duce the twenty-five nor would he tell annythin' about it. So, Gil, sez he, shot him cause he felt sure he'd squealed ter the Royal North-West Mounted police over ter Fort Anderson, an' also had swiped them bills. See?"

Obie laughed to himself.

After murdering his band member on suspicious only. Gil had not, it seemed, forethought enough to search the body probably never thinking that there was any money in the pockets of the dead man while as a matter of fact in the pockets was the cash the man had lost his life for; and had Gil Burgos not been mad with rage he would have found the money he had committed murder for, right in his hand.

"Mysterious are the ways of Providence," thought Obie. "The cash was left for us to find. It hasn't brought us much luck so far, but if this unspeakable rascal falls for the lure of the bright stuff, I fancy that it will have paid us back all the trouble we took to find it."

Obie then spoke aloud.

"Is that island over there wheré Gil keeps his money?"

"Shore! The gang's money and Gil's is all thar."

"Why don't you go over and help yourself?"

There was scorn in the eyes of the outlaw.

"I ain't plannin' to die yet."

"Then the place is guarded?"

"You bet."

"What by?"

"I dunno. But it's guarded fer keeps."

"Hum."

"Wot's thet yer say?"

"Nothing."

The two men mused a few moments. Then Obie broke the silence.

"Say," he said, "where's the treasure of the outlaws hidden on the island?"

"I dunno."

"Will you tell me?"

"Ef I make a bargain wit ye, I'll tell ye all I know."

"Ah."

"An' I'll tell ye right hyar thet I'll make er bargain' ef they's a chanst ter git outen this yar territory ahead er a bullet frum Gil Burgos' rifle. See?"

"Suppose that I give you the cash now—that is, after you have told me the secrets of the island?"

"Thet will do."

"But how do I know whether you will keep your word to me? How do I know whether the information you have given me is correct?"

"Yer can't know. Ye have ter take a chanst thet I am telling ye the truth, just as much as I've got ter take a chanst thet I kin git off ahead of Gil's bullit."

Obie knew that the outlaw was right.

Both must "take a chance."

"Any way there's asserted to be 'honor among thieves,'" muttered Obie to himself. "I guess I'll have to take the 'chanst.'"

"It's a hoss-trade," Obie now cried.

Obie rapidly counted out the money which had been passed over to him by Arlie before he left the fighting legion as he and Arlie called the little party.

There was a pleased look on Jozse's face when he counted over the bills and found them fine, new, and all there.

"Say, you're on the square," he cried. "I'm a goin' ter pay ye back fer yer squariness."

"Good!" answered Obie with a laugh. "This is a case of 'bread on the waters' isn't it?"

"Say, d'ye think I'm chump enough ter throw good bread-inter water? Now not fer mine."

Obie smiled.

Evidently there were some things that the outlaw had not read.

"I suppose that outlawing interrupts your literary pursuits, eh?" replied Obie.

Jozsef gave a suspicious snort but went on to unfold his tale.

"Thar's a ribber behint whar youse people are hemmed in, eh?"

"Yes, I think there is."

"It's er part o' this here Mackenzie ribber."

"Yes, a sort of arm of it."

"Now, say, youse jest creeps down ter that arm of the ribber and say, thet's all thar is to it. Yez can make yer sneak easy like from thar. See?"

"How can we escape from there—you chaps stole our canoes."

"Haw! Haw! Haw! So we did. Say, beau, ef ye raises the trees thet overhangs the ribber thar, erbout twenty feet from a blasted oak tree, ter th' East o' the tree, ye'll find ten er fifteen canoes. Thet's whar Gil keeps his spare canoes hidden away. See?"

Obie saw.

"Say, I guess I've put my cash to good use," he cried.

"I ain't no wolf, like that thar Gil Burgos," cried Jozsef. "Now before we shed the partin' tear, thar's one thing more ter tell yer."

"Yes. How to get to the buried treasure of Gil on Mackenzie island, over there—the big one directly opposite us?"

"Yes. Thet's the home o' the gold o' this hyar gang."

"I know. But how do you get to it?"

"All I kin tell ye is thet I seen Gil Burgos onst go up to thet hand shriveled cold in death, and shake it as ef he was shakin' hands wit an old friend."

"What?"

"That's gospil truth. Then I seen arter thet that thar tree jest a turn round as ef it was built on wheels, Gol dang me if I din't."

"Man, you're crazy!"

"Not a bit. Ef ye wants ter git ter the bottom o' thet secret ye must go and grasp that dead hand. The rest ye must larn yourself. See?"

With these fateful words, Jozsef, the Brute, vanished in the underbrush.

"I'll go and shake that dead hand," muttered Obie, "if it shakes me into eternity."

He turned and began worming his way back to his friends.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE ISLAND OF MYSTERY.

"Well, what did you learn?"

"A lot."

"Good!"

"Want to hear it all?"

"You bet I do."

When this conversation came to a pause and Obie Good had told Arlie Thanet just what Jozsef Martino had told him, Arlie stared in amazement.

"By thunder," Arlie cried, "Did you give up five thou' on that long chance?"

"What long chance?"

"You don't think that outlaw was telling you the truth, do you?"

"You bet I do."

"Your faith is child-like."

"Can't see it that way. He gave up the information and I think he told the truth."

"I'm going to let you wake up. Child, you're dreaming."

"Nary a dream. I really believe that this is so. That the outlaw told me the truth."

"Come off."

"Say, Arlie have you got any money left?"

"Matter of a few hundred."

"What, to make a bet?"

"If there's a chance in the world for me I'll bet on it."

"You ought to be willing to back your opinions with your gun or with your cash."

"Child, I'm always ready to do that."

"Good. Well, here's your chance. I've got five hundred left in bills drawn upon the Bank of Toronto."

"You lucky dog."

"And I'm going to gamble it right on the chance that Jozsef Martino told the truth."

Arlie pulled a wad of money in bank-bills out of his pocket.

"You're on," he cried. "Put up your cash."

"Who'll hold the stake?" asked Arlie.

"I will," Helen interrupted. "You bold gamblers need a stake-holder. Here I am."

"Who'll hold Helen," asked Obie, with a smile.

"I will—if she'll let me," returned Arlie.

"Well, she won't" dryly remarked Helen, "but she will hold the stake."

"Just listen to this girl. First she says she won't; then she says she will which shall we take as her answer?"

"Being a woman suppose you take both—and believe neither," replied Helen as she rushed off with her stakes, which she promptly secreted.

"I wonder what they were betting about?" she cried to herself.

Before she could find out she heard Arlie and Obie still debating.

"Hush, boys, don't quarrel. Your hands were not made to scratch each other's eyes out with. Try to be civil to each other. You remind me of a church tea in which all the women of the parish fight like cats and dogs."

"Well, it's this way," put in Arlie.

"No, it isn't, et's that way," cried Obie.

"Clack! Cluck! Clack!" said Helen, "listen to you boys. You make me smile."

"Sweet smile from the girl I——" sang Obie.

"Never mind that girl; spare the ears of this girl," dryly added Helen. "Now what's the dispute about?"

"Nothing. Only dear girl," replied Arlie, "this man is a verdant youth from the country who takes stock in green-goods stories. He is the kind of chap the confidence men in large cities sell alleged counterfeit money to—one hundred for twenty-five dollars! five-hundred for fifty—then ten thousand for one thousand—and when you get your alleged counterfeit you find yourself holding the bag. Some one has flim-flamed you out of your honest coin by selling you counterfeit nit—just selling you green paper cut the size of bank bills with a good bill for two dollars showing on top of the pile."

"Don't he tell that story well?" answered Obie. "He used to be in the green-goods business. He was the 'come on.'"

"What's the 'come-on'?" queried Helen.

"Oh, he's the member of the green-goods gang that meets the guy who 'comes-on' from the country to buy the alleged counterfeit stuff."

"But what's this got to do with our escape from here?"

"Not a thing in the world. I'm only knocking your friend Arlie Thanet here!"

Arlie was grinning.

Then he told Helen the story of the dead hand.

Helen's flesh quaked with dread.

The subject of the dead hand was a horrible one for her to think of.

To go and grasp it was something that she knew she could not do for a thousand times the reward that the bandit gold would give her.

But Helen knew men.

She knew that most men have to grasp more than dead hands to wrest gold from pirates of the mercantile world.

She knew that the two young men wouldn't hesitate a moment in the grasping of hands if they thought

there was a ghost of a show of winning the fortune that must lay behind the hiding place of the Burgos outlaws.

Helen knew something about the plan and scope of the Burgos gang.

She knew they must have saved a large amount of plunder in spite of the frequent visits they paid to the settlements of Fort McPherson and Fort Anderson, where they engaged in the pleasant pastime of "blowing their wads" in good old cow-boy style, which after all is the style of "blowing" indulged in by barbaric natures in all frontier towns whether on the cattle ranges, or on the frontiers of the far North-West.

"There's danger of course in grasping the dead-hand?" she questioned.

"We don't know. Outlaw gold isn't easy to get. Just how the devilish ingenuity of this man Burgos has managed to protect the gold of his band which he has secreted on that island I do not know—but I feel sure that he has in some way protected it," answered Obie.

"Oh, he has it all cut and dried. The gold is there. The dead hand will yield it up as soon as he grasps it, and he will get my five hundred and his share of the bullets of Gil Burgos at the same time."

"Don't laugh! But that is what I'm going to do," chimed in Obie, "except the bullets are of gold not lead, and I'm going to take 'em away from Gil, instead of him putting them into me."

"Well?" asked Helen in an interrogative tone.

"The proof of the pudding is the eating thereof," put in Arlie. "If we don't try—why there you are."

"Right. Shall we all go together?"

"Better sneak down and see if the boats, those canoes that the outlaw friend of Obie talked about, are there in the river," cried Arlie with a suggestion of a sneer. "If they are there we might begin to take some stock in the dead hand matter."

"I'll soon see if the canoes are there," replied Obie, nothing daunted by Arlie's tone. "If they are it's one step toward the dead hand; it proves that in one thing at least this fellow Jozsef told the truth."

"That is true," replied Helen. "But be careful. I am afraid the outlaws are hatching up some new scheme. They have not fired a shot in an hour."

"They don't have to. They seem to think that we have no hope of escape. From their standpoint that looks pretty sure, at that."

"I guess it does," answered Helen. "The outlaws have stolen our horses."

"They have stolen our canoes," said Arlie.

"We can't swim to either Fort McPherson or Fort Anderson the nearest places to us."

"We can't ride," replied Helen.

"So if I was a real bandit I wouldn't be surprised but that instead of sending good shot over our way, and burning up unnecessary power, I'd do as the bandits have done."

"You'd sit still and starve us into submission."

Helen said these words with a sigh.

Arlie shrugged his shoulders.

"You can sit and starve if you want to!" cried Obie.

"I'm going down to the boats on the strand there, behind that leafy bower that Jozsef told me about. Bet your life I ain't going to sit here until a lot of thugs are ready to come here and shoot me up."

With these words, Obie disappeared in the darkness

for it was now nearly ten o'clock in the hush of a North-West night.

"Well, what do you think of it all?" asked Arlie of Helen when Obie had disappeared.

"I don't know what to think. What is your opinion?"

"I feel sure that there will be no boats there. If we had just two canoes we would be all right. I could run one, and Obie the other and we could leave things here, taking along enough provisions to last us to Fort Anderson."

"How far is the fort?"

"About five hundred miles—with the river current with us all the way—we ought to get to the fort in ten days steady traveling."

"We would travel easily, pretty fast with Gil Burgos behind us."

"He would tend to accelerate any wayfarers on this dear old Mackenzie river. Well, it's all up to Obie. If he finds the canoes, and can thus make good on that part of Jozsef's story, why—"

"He can make good," came the quiet voice of Obie at the elbow of Arlie and Helen.

It was Obie Good speaking.

"You can," cried Arlie and Helen together.

"Sure. Watch me cop Arlie's five hundred. He will never buy wedding furniture of an installment house, on my five hundred," went on Obie.

In spite of her self-control, Helen could not help the wave of color that swept over her face.

"I've got five hundred more, Helen," cried Arlie with infinite meaning in his eyes.

"Wait," replied Helen softly.

There was a happy light in Arlie's eyes as he turned again toward Obie.

Now Obie wasn't so obtuse as he seemed.

He winked at Arlie.

Then he whistled "The Girl I left behind Me," drew a long breath and said as he struck an heroic attitude:

"The canoes are quite there. Quite where Jozsef said they were. I am quite sure of winning my five hundred out of you, you love-sick chump."

Arlie laughed.

"Boy, you haven't won yet. I feel like the Irishman who was taken up on a wager that he could carry a companion up a ladder on the outside of a tall sky-scraper being built in a large city."

"Well?"

Helen had meanwhile hurried away to prepare for the river journey she now was sure was inevitable.

"So carrying his friend, Pat began climbing up the ladders," went on Arlie. "At the eighth story Pat nearly lost the bet, and the life of himself and friend by a fall down to the ground hundreds of feet below by an unfortunate stumble. The bet being five cents Pat did not want to lose. So he hung on. Finally the sixteenth story was reached and Pat claimed the five cents. 'I'll pay' said his friend 'but when yer foot slipped I had me hopes!'"

"That is you still have hopes?" merrily cried Obie.

"I have."

"What of?"

"Winning."

"Winning what? Girl or cash?"

Arlie threw a stump at Obie's head.

"Huh," he cried. "I mean cash, of course!"

"Well your 'fut' won't 'shlip' this trip. You may have lost the cash—but——"

"But what?"

"Seems to me you've won the girl."

Arlie moved away still whistling "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

"Have you won her yet?"

"Won what?"

"The girl you're whistling about?"

"You bet. Had her won in a walk before I signed up with a chum like you. See?"

Arlie grinned as Obie walked away.

In fifteen minutes Professor Vernon, Pompey Duck-legs, and Obie were seated in one canoe, with provisions, powder, shot, cartridges, and enough blankets to make them comfortable in the canoe.

There were equal provisions in the canoe in which were Helen and Arlie.

"If the canoes are separated," quoth Arlie, "there will be provisions aboard each. If they are all in one canoe the loss of the one craft would end all hope for every one."

The preparations having been made, the two canoes quietly and noiselessly hurried to the isle of mystery, under the strong strokes of the two clever young men.

Soon the leading canoe, in which were Arlie and Helen, touched the sandy shore of the island where the dead hand still pointed to lights and laughter in the far away settlement of Fort McPherson.

Pompey, Professor Vernon and Helen were left alone in the canoes, but these were secreted under the verdure which grew down and made a perfect canopy of shelter along the river bank.

"Now for the dead hand!" cried Arlie.

"I suppose you will insist on my giving the dead hand, my glad hand?" Obie asked.

"You bet. This is your bet, not mine. You dealt the cards. You turn over each card."

"It's a whirl," cried Obie.

The two men in the pitchy darkness stumbled with fleet yet cautious steps toward the dead hand.

It was no easy matter finding in the impalpable darkness, the tree upon which the hand was nailed.

At length they stood beneath it.

They could just see the dread whiteness, the pale luminous light that seemed to dance over it.

It was like the ghost-like lights that some times appears above the graves of the newly dead.

In spite of himself Arlie's legs trembled.

Obie was quaking equally with his companion, but each managed to conceal their fear.

At length, as if wishing to have the matter over quickly, Obie caught the dead hand in his.

He gave it a mighty wrench.

Then the surprising thing happened.

The tree shook.

It slowly gave way to some concealed force.

The apparently mighty tree was sliding backwards. It stopped.

There before the feet of the two shuddering men, appeared a wide, dark hole. A ladder ran from the surface of the ground down into a seemingly bottomless pit.

Dark as it was, there was enough starlight to show the two men that the grasping of the dead hand had moved a tree, which had been made to appear to be the companion of the other trees in the forest about

it, but which was really a cleverly devised secret hiding place of the outlaw's gold.

"Get your guns ready. Come on, Arlie," cried Obie. "I'm going down into that hole, you bet. Down there is the outlaw's gold."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEMON PIRATES AT WORK.

Click!

Click!

Whack!

These were the sounds the two intrepid men heard a moment later when they had reached the bottom of the ladder.

The two young men, Arlie Thanet and Obie Good, grasped each other by the arm as they spoke words of encouragement to each other as the strange sounds smote their ears.

"What's that?" said Obie.

"Dunno," replied Arlie. "It sounds like a pick-axe."

They listened again.

Click!

Click!

Whack!

The sounds were repeated.

"Thunder," said Arlie, "it's pick-axes, all right."

"Who do you suppose is down here?" questioned Obie.

"May be the outlaws are there at work. You know we weren't sure that they were still in the woods over by our improvised fort. They may also have split up their band. Half may be watching us, the other half may be here."

"It's all pure speculation any way. Let's rush forward and see what we can see, eh?"

"Good idea. Lead on."

The two men tip-toed forward.

One of the strangest sights that ever met the eye of mortals was shown to their wondering eyes in a few steps beyond.

There was a great light from many torches held by rough, fierce, villainous looking men.

The torches showed a big excavation, which had without doubt been dug out by the outlaws.

"But these men are not outlaws," hissed Obie in the ear of Arlie.

"What are they?" returned Arlie.

"I don't know."

The men were dressed in fantastic garb.

One man right before them was a tremendously tall, broad shouldered fellow.

He wore a strange foreign costume.

His trousers were wide, and something like those worn by a regiment of French zouaves.

His green jacket, was laced and re-laced with gold fringe.

His fierce brown hair and eyes seemed to smack of a foreign race.

He wore a great ring in each ear, the ring was of solid gold.

His feet wore boots of tanned yellowish leather that reached just to his knees, and which there made a great flange, as they turned over with a wide dip to show that they were lined with red Cordova leather.

A curved sword with the blade shining in the man's hand as he pointed with it hither and thither, made quivering shafts of light about the place.

Arlie and Obie saw the hilt of the sword was a mass of gems.

Around the wild head of this figure was a red handkerchief which gave his face a terrible glow of satanic fierceness.

"Good Lordy," whispered Arlie to Obie. "This isn't any of Gil Burgos' band. This is a pirate. That man there is one of the Eastern world sea-rovers. He comes from another hemisphere—why is he here?"

The pirate commander in a breath answered Arlie's question with a remark he made.

"At last we have our hands on the treasures of Mackenzie Isles!" roared the demon-pirate.

The flashing host about him, clad more soberly but much in the same way as their leader, were busy as bees.

Some were digging about a hole in the center of the excavation. Others were massed about a huge chest rippling over with gold coins.

"*The Treasures of Mackenzie Isles*," mourned Arlie. "We can never get them for ourselves. That band of pirates is worse than Gil Burgos' and his band of outlaws."

The two men withdrew then further into the shadow.

"Very well," cried Arlie. "If we can't get the treasures of Mackenzie island it isn't our fault."

"It isn't," replied Obie. "Any way we made a bold shot for the gold. But did you ever see so much gold in your life? There's boxes, bales, and chests of it. There must be many millions of gold here."

"I don't know. Neither do you. I don't know how big the coins are. Oh, I say, I don't know where the coins were coined. For instance you can get a lot of money in China for an American dollar."

"How much?" asked Obie.

"In the coin called 'cash' I once got a pint of copper coins for a dollar, it seemed to me."

Obie smothered a laugh.

"Let's go and live there," he cried. "China is the place I've been looking for in which to buy me a house for quite a spell back."

The two men speculated for some time but no answer that seemed plausible to them accounted for the presence of the pirates in the den in which they were secreted in the darkness at one side.

"Did you see anywhere as we sailed here in our canoes anything that looked like a boat?"

"No," replied Obie.

"Did you see anything that looked like a guard set by these fierce fellows at the entrance to the ladder where the dead hand seems to be protecting and protesting against this loot of the outlaw's gold?"

"No. I saw nothing."

"Crouch down. Here comes the band."

The two men tried to dig into the earth in their efforts to escape the eyes of the pirates.

They need not have taken so much pains.

The pirates were so sure that they would be left undisturbed, and in their fierce glee at finding the outlaw's gold would have been ready to not care, anyway, who saw them.

"There's at least fifty or sixty men in that gang," whispered Arlie as the outlaws staggered by them, parties of two or three carrying between them great boxes of gold, silver, merchandise, silks, satins, opium,—the loot gather in the outlaw's drag-net oh, for so many years of blood and danger."

"That's a Chinese pirate sure," said Obie as he saw a man whose Mongolian origin was plainly marked on his face.

"That chap next to him looks to be from Africa," pointed out Arlie.

"There's a man from the Philippines."

"He's a Yankee, that next chap."

"Look at the little Dutchman from Holland."

"There's an old time English jack tar."

"Those two chaps with those bales of silk are Spaniards."

"There's an Italian."

"Was there ever such a typical pirate crew? It's from all countries."

"But how in thunder did they get here?"

"If I was betting I'd say that this gang is a piratical crew who came here via the Arctic Ocean around from the Pacific Ocean, through the Bering Strait, by Alaska, around by Herschel Island, thence into Mackenzie Bay, and then up the Mackenzie River to here where we are now."

"Yes. That might be. But where do they hail from?"

"The good Lord only knows. If I was guessing at all I should say they came from some where in the Caribbean Sea. There's still real pirates down that way, you know. The kind like these that would make an outlaw look like a counterfeit five cent piece in a box of twenty-dollar gold pieces."

"How do you suppose they knew of this treasure?"

"If I was betting I would say that Jozsef Martino sold out to this gang, and also to us."

"Ho?"

"He'd get probably some of the gold from this pirate crowd."

"Not so he would notice it. This gang of pirates may have been willing to treat with Jozse, but as for a division—the only division he will get will come from a knife in the hands of one of that wide-trousered gang."

"Did you notice what excellent English that chief pirate who was doing all the ordering gave his men when he was howling to them?"

"I did, and I wondered at it. But while I thought this might be a disguised gang of men, who were really part of the Burgos gang, and were putting up this pirate idea a la masquerade, I had to give up that theory when I saw how the races were mingled in the pirate band. They're the real thing, you bet. No one could imitate the race question and the gang that Burgos has about him is the usual half Indian, half white, and wholly white rough gun-men, and general thieves in the North-West."

"This pirate crowd is made of sterner stuff?"

"I should say they were. That gang is the toughest lot of citizens I ever laid eyes on. They are the type that 'have sailed the Spanish main' in the days gone by, lived the life of the pirate in the Dry Tortugas, infested old Panama—the real pirate of the days when piracy was a profession."

"You're right."

"But my, how I hated to see that gold go to this gang."

"Well, we don't know really how they came here, where they will go, who they are or anything about them. But we do know, that we have lost a great fortune—well it's ever my fate to see the other chap walk away with the loot."

The two men turned to leave the place.

They were bitterly disappointed.

They had braved danger and paid out their money for information so that they would be rewarded for their pains; but it was not to be.

The pirates had gotten to the place of hiding the outlaws' loot in advance.

"Well, never mind."

Arlie thus spoke.

"Aren't you afraid they will find our canoes?"

"Not a bit of it. The canoes are too securely hidden in the first place, and the pirates are too overjoyed at their success in securing this wonderful loot of the outlaws to pay much attention to outside matters."

"Well I hope so——"

Before he could possibly add another word the sound of a shot rang overhead.

There was a wild scream.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Shot after shot followed each other in a wild sound of strife and deadly turmoil.

Screams of rage followed.

More shots rang out on the air.

Then there came a regular fusillade of shots.

Men's voices crying orders could be heard.

There was tramping of feet.

It was without doubt the noise of a terrible conflict.

"The pirates and Gil Burgos have met," cried Arlie.

"They are fighting it out for the gold," replied Obie.

There was now the steady roar of a great battle that drifted down the shaft-like entrance to the place where the treasure had been buried.

Then there came, as if a hand had stopped it all with one single pressure upon a man's throat, a sudden silence.

Arlie and Obie strained their ears to find what it meant; this sudden cessation from the din of battle; this absolute silence was appalling.

They could not hear a sound.

For five, ten, fifteen minutes they waited, expecting every moment to see a pirate thrust his body down the ladder.

A smoking torch that lay before them showed what their wondering senses were almost ready to doubt, that there had been the scene they had witnessed in this treasure-house of Gil Burgos' gang.

After waiting in awed silence, as tense as the silence above them on the surface of the earth, Arlie spoke.

"Gosh! Wasn't that fierce?" he said.

"Wasn't it?" replied Obie. "It must have been a fearful combat."

"Gee! I hate to go up there. I'll bet the dead are knee deep."

"Say did you hear that scream when the first shot was fired?"

"You bet I did. It was some one's death screech."

The two men were sweating like butchers.

They could not see each other in the darkness.

"Are you game to run up the ladder?" whispered Arlie.

"You bet I am. Anything is better up there than this suspense down here. Lead the way."

With furtive steps the two men ran up the ladder.

They slouched out of the infernal hole like rats scuttering and squeaking from a ship.

They looked fearfully about them.

There was no sign of any carnage.

The dead were not piled knee deep.

There was no dead man to be seen at all, as a matter of fact.

"What's that?" cried Arlie as he saw something shining lying on the ground.

"A snake," cried Obie.

Both men jumped backward.

As the shining thing did not move they at length decided to approach nearer to it.

"Hah!" cried Arlie as he dashed forward and picked up the shining thing.

It was the hilt and one-half the blade of the gem-set sword that the pirate chief had carried. The sword blade had been shivered at a point about fifteen inches from the hilt.

Arlie examined the hilt of the sword in the dim light.

Even his unpracticed eyes, saw that it was literally encrusted with diamonds, rubies, pearls and emeralds. Other precious stones of which he had no knowledge were thickly set in the bauble.

"Say, what do you think this thing is worth?" whispered Arlie.

"I don't know—say there's fifty thousand dollars' worth of gems right here," replied Obie. "This any way is something of a reward for all our labors."

"But do you suppose that the pirates overlooked anything down in that underground place?" put in Arlie.

"I don't know. Say there was a torch there. I'll stump you to go back and see."

"Come on."

The two young men again braved the dangers of the under-world.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WONDERFUL BIT OF LUCK.

As they climbed down the ladder the two men talked freely, for they felt now that whatever had happened that neither the pirates or the band of Gil Burgos would ever be heard of again.

"What is your solution of this matter?" asked Obie of Arlie.

"By George, it's got me puzzled. I can't get it through my hair."

"There's one sure thing no pirate gang like the one we have seen here ever was known in the North-West before!"

"Not in my time. In early days this bleak spot was often visited by pirates from the Caribbean sea, for about Herschel Island are found old camps of the old pirates of a hundred years ago, but the march of civilization has pretty well put away the pirate. He isn't much in evidence any more except in the Far East!"

"Then how did those pirates come here, way up Mackenzie River as we are?"

"Dunno! But if Jozsef Martino, hasn't had something to do with getting those chaps here, as we said before, I am mistaken."

"He sold out to the pirates and to us?"

"Yes. Any man who will sell you out once, will sell some one the same secret you have, for a little more cash."

"W-e-l-l! I'd rather buy a secret than sell one."

"So say we all of us."

"Well, we need not fear the Burgos band of outlaws further?"

"I think not."

"What do you suppose became of them?"

"I'd bet any one a good round sum that they were all captured by the pirates and were taken away either to be murdered by the pirates later, or to be sold as slaves in some distant part of the world."

"Sure."

"Yes I think it's pretty sure. The outlaw band of Gil Burgos is certainly wiped out."

"Then there's no one to pursue Jozsef Martino?"

"No one—nothing will pursue him but his own fears. Sometimes these fears are the worse thing we can suffer."

"Well, then, we may as well feel that the selling of the information as he did to us, on the part of Jozsef was a mighty good thing for us."

"I can't see it that way."

"Why not?"

"Don't you see, that if we had not had all kinds of good luck what would have happened to us?"

"No I don't see."

"Well, man, it looks easy to me."

"What looks easy?"

"For you to see what I mean."

"But I don't see. Please explain."

Arlie leaned over toward Obie,

"Suppose we had bumped into that gang of pirates just as they reached this tree? Where would you and I be now?"

"I don't know where we would be—seeing as I ain't no future reader, but there's one place our dead bodies would be—and that is right here."

Arlie nodded.

"Gosh! Then that infernal outlaw just sold us a secret which he hoped would bump us up against the pirates to whom he had also sold the entire secret."

"That's my idea of it."

"Oh, Jozsef, dear Jozsef, the Brute, if I *only* had you here for two minutes."

"But why did he sell us the secret of the boats, the canoes that Gil Burgos had secreted?"

"He knew our boats were stolen."

"As I suspect that he stole them himself, I fancy that he did with a vengeance."

"We could not get here without canoes?"

"Certainly not."

"So he could not work out his plan for revenge on us by any other method than to tell us how we could get to the island."

"Ah."

"If on our way to the island we got it in the neck from Gil Burgos well and good; if we got it in the neck from the pirates, well and good. If we made a stand and the pirates got it in the neck from us, or Gil got it from us, or the pirates and Gil got it together—any way you view the problem Jozsef stood to win."

"That is every way but one."

"What was that way?"

"By a victory of the pirates."

"Well he couldn't lose then. All he had to do was to worm back into the gang, keep his teeth shut and no one would know that he was a secret seller; a giver-up of his employer to other men for money."

"By George, I guess you're right."

"Well that's as far as we ever will get into this mystery. Anyway, we have a gem-set sword handle worth many, many dollars."

"May be there's more coming to us, when we search

the place down below where the pirates were lugging off the outlaws' loot."

"All right. Where's that stump of a torch?"

Soon Arlie had lighted the torch.

Its sickly rays showed the same interior as when the two men had peeped from shadow at the pirates.

"Nothing doin'," cried Obie in disgust. "They have cleaned this place slicker than a hound's tooth."

"Oh, not so fast," rejoined Arlie. "Wait until we examine everything."

The two men turned over every inch of space in the den without being rewarded in the slightest degree.

"They got it all," cried Arlie at length.

He sat down in the earth of the excavation he had been laboriously making.

Obie started over to speak to him, when his foot caught and he measured his length in the earth.

"Look out, stupid, you'll kill yourself."

Obie jumped up.

"What did I catch my foot in—say," he cried, "by thunder, Arlie, look there. See? There's an iron ring sticking out of the ground. I stepped in that."

With a howl of joy Arlie grasped the ring.

"Gosh!" he cried. "I can't lift it."

Obie rushed to his aid.

"It's a thunderin' big chest," he cried. "Now all together."

The two men pulled upward with all the force of their two muscular bodies.

The earth cracked about the iron ring.

It gave way.

Slowly, but surely there appeared above the place where it was buried a great chest.

Soon the chest lay on the surface of the pit.

Arlie cut into it with an axe left by the pirates.

"It's gold, Obie," he whispered. "It's yellow gold." He spoke truly.

One chest was overlooked by the pirates.

When it was equally divided between Arlie, Obie, Helen, Pompey Ducklegs, and Professor Vernon some months later, when the entire party had regained civilization, it was found that each of the sharers in the outlaws' loot, was the possessor of fifty-two thousand dollars.

"By gosh!" howled Obie as he grasped a handful of the gold, "the pirates didn't get it all—but my, what if we had what they did get?"

"Human nature again," replied Arlie, "Never satisfied."

* * * * *

The next day when the party were floating down stream with all their luggage packed away, happy and content, with the great chest of gold that had given them fortune packed neatly away, Obie Good had a thought.

"Say Helen," he said, "we are all agreed that you're going to be given enough diamonds to make you a wonderful necklace from the hilt of the pirate's sword."

"Thank you, Obie," said Helen. "And thank all you good people here who are so generous to me."

"It's a wedding present!" he cried a second later. "Say Arlie when is the wedding to be?"

"Just as soon as we get to Fort Anderson," cried Arlie.

THE END.

The next issue will be "American Indian Weekly" No. 16, entitled, **HELD UP AT SNAKE BASIN, or The Renegades' Death Vote.**



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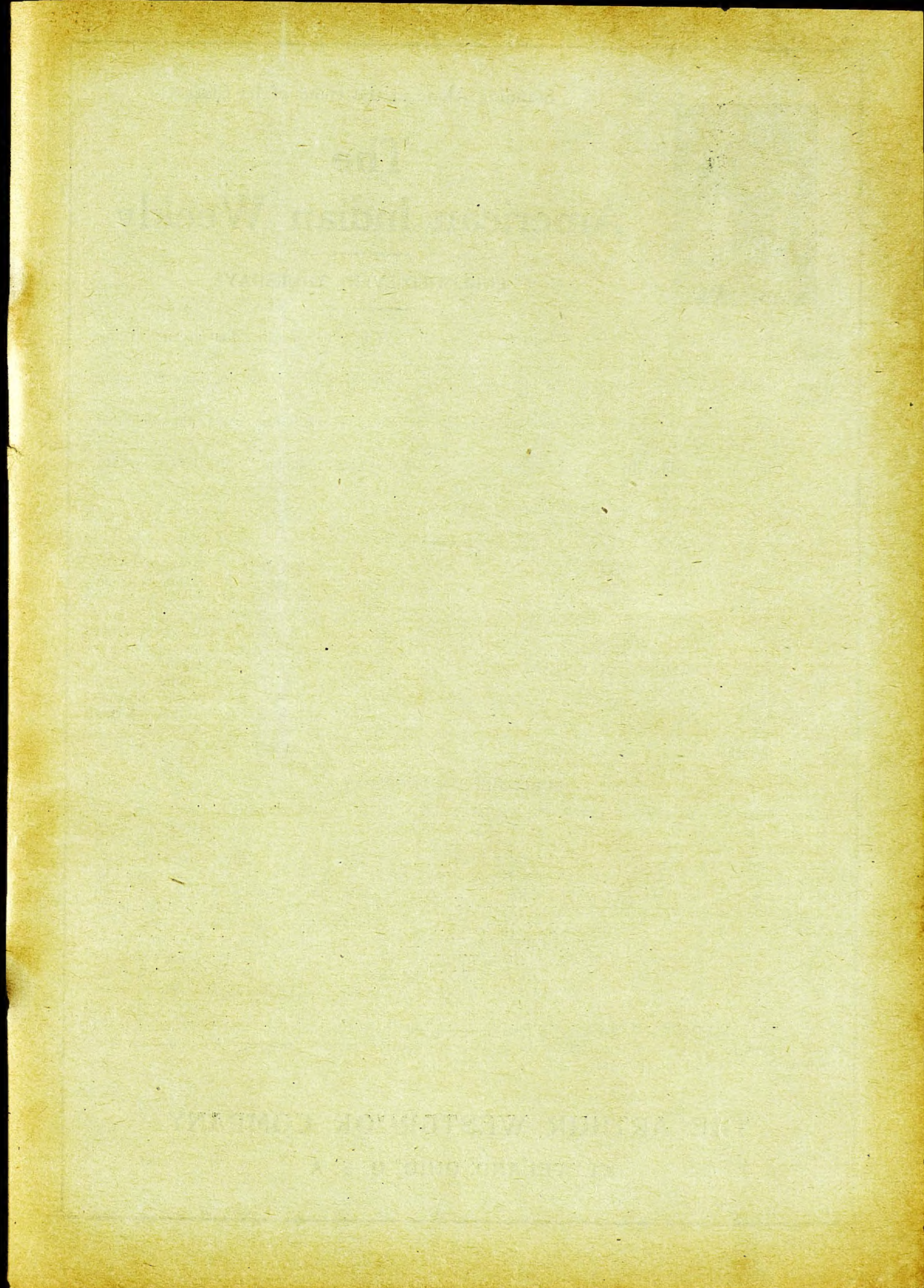
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66. The Old Miser's Secret; A Strange Detective Case.
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72. Tragedy and Strategy; being the conclusion of "The Omnipresent Avenger."
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89. Foiling the Conspirators; or Daring Tom Carey to the Rescue.
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92. The Vengeance of Fate; being the sequel to "Gasparoni, the Italian Detective."
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95. The Secret of the Kidnapped Heir; A Strange Detective Narrative.
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97. "Old Ironsides" in New York; or The Daughter of the G. A. R.
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103. The Lust of Hate; being the sequel to "Trailed by an Assassin."
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107. Gardemore, the Detective; or the King of the "Shadows."
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109. The Mask of Mystery; or The Graveyard Murder.
110. The Twisted Trail; being the sequel to the Mask of Mystery.
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112. The Beautiful Captive; being the continuation of Booth Bell.
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114. The Wall Street Detective; or Harry Weir, the Lightning Trailer.
115. The Banker's Secret; being the sequel to The Wall Street Detective.
116. The Wizard's Trail; or The Mystery of a Lost Casket.
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118. Old Sleuth in New York; or Trailing a Great Criminal.
119. Manfred, the Ventriloquist Detective; or Wonderful Midnight "Shadows" in New York.
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134. The League of Four; or The Trail of the Man Tracker.
135. The House of Fear; or The Young Duke's Strange Quest.

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- Feb. 3—136. Foiled by Fate; being the sequel to The House of Fear.
Feb. 10—137. A Dash for Millions; or Old Ironsides Trail of Mystery.
Feb. 17—138. The Trail of Three; or The Motor Pirates' Last Stand.
Feb. 24—139. A Dead Man's Hand; or Caught by his Own Victim.

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